

STREET & SMITH'S • *Now the best costs 10¢.*

DETECTIVE STORY

NOVEMBER
1937

REG. U. S. PAT. OFFICE

**NOW
10¢**

MAGAZINE

NOVELETTES BY

CHRISTOPHER B. BOOTH

WALTER RIPPERGER

HARRINGTON STRONG



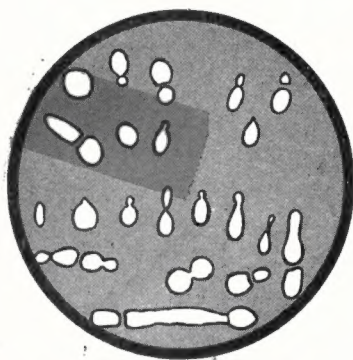
**Thubway Tham's
Hot Wallet**

by

JOHNSTON McCULLEY

This is the stubborn germ you must kill if you want

REAL RELIEF FROM DANDRUFF



Pityrosporum ovale

The germ which causes dandruff, magnified many times. In cases of dandruff it is always present on the scalp and hair and in dandruff scales.

If you have any evidence of dandruff, don't waste time on untried ointments, salves or solutions that merely strike at symptoms and relieve only temporarily.

Use the new treatment that really gets at the cause . . . the only treatment so far as we know that has proved itself repeatedly in laboratory and clinic . . . the treatment that is getting results for countless people who try it . . . Listerine Antiseptic once or twice a day, accompanied by massage.

Listerine surrounds the hair and scalp and penetrates infected hair follicles, and kills the germ *Pityrosporum ovale*, which, research now shows, causes dandruff.

See Improvement at Once

After the first few treatments you will notice how Listerine Antiseptic diminishes the number of unsightly crusts and scales. How it allays irritating itch and burning which so often accompany a dandruff condition. How it cleanses and freshens the scalp so that it feels lively and youthful. How it brings new vigor to the hair, itself.

For your own satisfaction, examine Listerine's brilliant results in the most searching clinical study of dandruff undertaken in years.

Curing Rabbits of Dandruff

Rabbits given dandruff by inocula-



WOMEN SAY THE BEST WAY
TO APPLY **LISTERINE** IS BY
MEDICINE DROPPER APPLIED
TO THE PART IN THE HAIR

tion of *Pityrosporum ovale* were treated on one side, only, with Listerine Antiseptic once a day. The other side was untreated.

Within four days improvement was noted, and at the end of fourteen days, on the average, a complete cure was effected. No scales, no crusts. The sides not treated with Listerine showed evidence of dandruff nearly a month later.

Relief in Two Weeks

In a noted midwestern skin clinic, men and women dandruff patients were chosen for the Listerine treatment. A majority were instructed to massage the scalp *once a day* with Listerine Antiseptic. The rest of the group used a non-antiseptic solution. We ask you to carefully note the convincing results again achieved:

A substantial number of the users of Listerine Antiseptic obtained

marked relief in the first two weeks on the average. In many other cases, scalps were found to be clear and free of dandruff in from three to eight weeks—itching stopped, dandruff scales were eliminated, and in some cases falling hair was terminated. *Virtually none of the persons using a non-antiseptic solution showed any improvement.*

76% Got Relief

Meanwhile in a New Jersey clinic, other dermatologists were cross-checking the results of the midwestern clinic. Fifty men and women, all with definitely established cases of dandruff, were undergoing treatment twice a day with Listerine Antiseptic. At the end of three weeks, 76% showed either complete disappearance of, or marked improvement in, the symptoms of dandruff, i.e., itching, scaling. Only three failed to respond to the Listerine treatment, possibly due, as a research report suggests, to irregularity in applying the treatment.

Keep it Up

If you have the slightest evidence of dandruff, start now with Listerine and massage, once a day at least. Twice a day is better. Caution: Don't expect overnight miracles. Remember, dandruff is a germ disease, requiring persistent and systematic treatment, which *should be antiseptic*. Remember, also, that Listerine's results against dandruff are a matter of laboratory and clinical record.

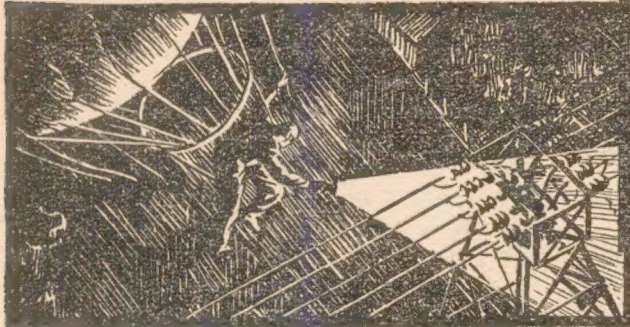
LAMBERT PHARMACAL COMPANY
St. Louis, Mo.

LISTERINE GETS RESULTS

Death Waited While He Hovered in the Sky!



**Crowd Waits
Electrocution
As Falling Balloon
Wafts toward Wires**



was going to set me none too gently down in a nest of hot, high-tension wires!

"I never did like jumping from balloons," writes G. W. de Grange, professional daredevil of Martinsburg, West Virginia, "and this time there was a mean wind to make matters worse.

"We finally got the hot air bag filled, and I took off in the dark from the fair grounds at Emmitsburg, Md., intending to make a parachute jump into the town square.

"But the balloon was soggy. She wouldn't give me altitude. I passed about 300 feet over the treetops of the town square, and didn't dare to jump...and then the big bag began to slowly settle.

"I tripped my 'Eveready' flashlight from its straps on my chute harness and snapped it on to see what was below me. To my horror, the balloon

"I've sideslipped by these death-dealing wires with a 'chute many a time... but just imagine steering a lollopy big dying balloon by pulling on the shrouds. But I pulled with everything I had while the crowd waited for an aerial execution... and because those faithful, fresh DATED 'Eveready' batteries were on the job, and showed methewires in time, I slid by certain death by inches! Without light the instant I needed it, that crowd would have got more than its money's worth. (Signed)

G. W. de Grange

"EVEREADY" BATTERIES ARE FRESH BATTERIES

The DATE-LINE guarantees FRESHNESS

NATIONAL CARBON CO., INC., 30 East 42nd St., New York, N. Y.



AND THAT'S WHY YOU WANT FRESH DATED 'EVEREADY' BATTERIES... A DRIED-OUT BATTERY DOESN'T LAST LONG, AND THIS DATE-LINE GUARANTEES FRESHNESS

STREET & SMITH'S

DETECTIVE STORY

Title Reg. U. S. Pat. Office

MAGAZINE

CONTENTS NOVEMBER, 1937 VOL. CLV. No. 1

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23rd YEAR OF PUBLICATION

Novelettes

HATRED HOUSE Walter Ripperger . . . 12
Money was hidden there. The spoils were for a lucky finder.

NOSED OUT Harrington Strong . . . 60
Murder in a swanky country club is solved by a method new to the metropolitan police.

DEATH-DEALING LIGHT Christopher B. Booth . . . 84
The two-timing young wife of a rich old man becomes the prey of a blackmailing detective.

Short Stories

TERROR STALKED T. T. Flynn . . . 47
Thoroughly bad himself, he could not recognize true goodness in another.

THUBWAY THAM'S HOT WALLET Johnston McCulley . . . 117
Craddock, weary of being "hawled out" by his captain, plans to frame Tham.

A Feature

The March of Crime 116

HEADQUARTERS CHAT The Editor . . . 115

A Department

UNDER THE LAMP Gerard Holmes . . . 126
If you are puzzle-minded.

ON SALE FIRST FRIDAY OF EACH MONTH

YEARLY SUBSCRIPTION \$1.00, SIX MONTHS 50c, SINGLE COPIES 10c

Monthly publication issued by Street & Smith Publications, Inc., 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y. Artemas Holmes, President; Ormond V. Gould, Vice President and Treasurer; Henry W. Balston, Vice President; Gerald H. Smith, Secretary; A. Lawrence Holmes, Assistant Secretary. Copyright, 1937, by Street & Smith Publications, Inc., New York. Copyright, 1937, by Street & Smith Publications, Inc., Great Britain. Entered as Second-class Matter, September 4, 1917, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under Act of Congress of March 3, 1879. Subscriptions to Cuba, Dom. Republic, Haiti, Spain, Central and South American Countries, except The Guianas and British Honduras, \$1.25 per year. To all other Foreign Countries, including The Guianas and British Honduras, \$1.70 per year.

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STREET & SMITH PUBLICATIONS, INC., 79 7th AVE., NEW YORK, N. Y.



I WILL TRAIN YOU AT HOME *in Spare Time* FOR A GOOD RADIO JOB



J. E. SMITH, President
National Radio Institute
Established 1914

Radio manufacturers and jobbers employ testers, inspectors, foremen, engineers, servicemen, paying up to \$6,000 a year. Radio operators on ships get good pay, see the world besides. Automobile, police, aviation, commercial Radio, and loud speaker systems offer good opportunities now and for the future. Television promises many good jobs soon. Men I trained at home have good jobs in all these branches of Radio.

Many Make \$5, \$10, \$15 a Week Extra in Spare Time While Learning

Almost every neighborhood needs a good spare time serviceman. The

Many Radio Experts Make \$30, \$50, \$75 a Week

Do you want to make more money? Broadcasting stations employ engineers, operators and pay up to \$5,000 a year. Spare time Radio set servicing pays as much as \$200 to \$500 a year—full time servicing jobs pay as much as \$30, \$50, \$75 a week. Many Radio Experts operate full time or part time Radio businesses.

day you enroll I start sending Extra Money Job Sheets showing how to do Radio repair jobs. Throughout your training I send plans and ideas that made good spare time money for hundreds. I send Special Equipment to conduct experiments, build circuits, get practical experience. I GIVE YOU A COMPLETE, MODERN, PROFESSIONAL ALL WAVE, ALL PURPOSE RADIO SET SERVICING INSTRUMENT TO HELP SERVICE SETS QUICKER—SAVE TIME, MAKE MORE MONEY.

Find Out What Radio Offers You
Mail the coupon now for "Rich Rewards in Radio." It's free to any fellow over 16 years old. It points out Radio's spare time and full time opportunities, also those coming in Television; tells about my training in Radio and Television; shows you letters from men I trained, telling what they are doing, earning; shows my Money Back Agreement. MAIL THE

J. E. SMITH, President
National Radio Institute, Dept. 7MD5
Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Smith: Without obligating me, send "Rich Rewards in Radio," which points out the spare time and full time opportunities in Radio and explains your 50-50 method of training men at home in spare time to become Radio Experts. (Please Write Plainly.)

NAME AGE.....
ADDRESS
CITY..... STATE.....

COUPON in an envelope or paste it on a penny postcard—NOW!

J. E. SMITH, President
National Radio Institute, Dept. 7MD5
Washington, D. C.



Please mention this magazine when answering advertisements

"I have REDUCED MY WAIST 8 INCHES WITH THE WEIL BELT"

... writes George Bailey



"I suddenly realized that I had become a fat man! The boys kidded me about my big 'punch'."

At parties I learned that I had become a "wall flower". Nobody wanted to dance with me.

In a bathing suit... I was immense. The day I heard some children laugh at me I decided to get a Weil Belt.



What a change! I looked 3 inches slimmer at once and soon I HAD ACTUALLY taken EIGHT INCHES off my waist... and 30 pounds off my weight!

It seemed to support the abdominal walls and keep the digestive organs in place... and best of all, I became acceptable for insurance!

I have a new enjoyment of life... I work better, eat better, play better... I didn't realize how much I was missing!

IF YOU DO NOT REDUCE YOUR WAIST THREE INCHES IN TEN DAYS

... it won't cost you a penny!



We have done this for thousands of others... we know we can do as much for you... that's why we make this unconditional offer!

THE MESSAGE-LIKE ACTION DOES IT
■ You will be completely comfortable and entirely unaware that its gentle pressure is working constantly while you walk, work or sit... its message-like action persistently eliminating fat with every move you make!

■ Many enthusiastic wearers write that the Weil Belt not only reduces fat but it also supports the abdominal walls and keeps the digestive organs in place... and with loss of fat comes increased endurance, pep and vigor!

IMPROVES YOUR APPEARANCE
■ The Weil Reducing Belt will make you appear many inches slimmer at once, and in 10 short days if your waistline is not actually 3 inches smaller... 3 inches of fat gone, it won't cost you one cent!

Don't Wait. Fat Is Dangerous
■ Insurance companies know the danger of fat accumulations. The best medical authorities warn against obesity. Don't wait any longer, act today!

SEND FOR 10 DAY FREE TRIAL OFFER

THE WEIL COMPANY, Inc. 5111, Hill St., New Haven, Conn.
Gentlemen: Send me FREE, your illustrated folder describing The Weil Belt and full details of your 10 Day FREE Trial Offer.

Name _____

Address _____

Use Coupon or Send Name and Address on Penny Post Card

FALSE TEETH



60 DAYS TRIAL

I have thousands of satisfied customers all over the country who could not afford to pay big prices. I have been making dental plates

for many years, by mail. I guarantee you satisfaction or they do not cost you one cent, and I take your word. Teeth made especially for you personally can be tried for sixty days. In one Pennsylvania town alone, 91 people are wearing teeth made by me. They are satisfied and have saved money.

SEND NO MONEY

My plates are very beautiful to look at and are constructed to give life-long service and satisfaction. You can look younger at once. They are made with pearly white genuine porcelain teeth. Well fitting and guaranteed unbreakable. Remember you do not send

FREE one cent—just your name and address, and we send free impression material and full detailed directions. Be sure to write today for my low prices and complete information. Don't put this off. Do it today.

DR. S. B. HEININGER, D. D. S.

440 W. Huron St., Dept. 1193, Chicago, Illinois

PILES DON'T BE CUT

Until You Try This Wonderful Treatment

for pile suffering. If you have piles in any form write for a FREE sample of Page's Pile Tablets and you will bless the day that you read this. Write today. E. R. Page Co., Dept. 416-C3, Marshall, Mich., or Toronto, Ont.

IF YOU ARE POISONED BY URIC ACID

Read Our Offer—Do This

Is Uric Acid in your blood causing "Arthritis," stiff joints; sore muscles; rheumatic pains; neuritis; neuralgia?

Bladder weakness? Kidney irritation? Up many times at night? "Worn Out"? "Acid" Stomach? "Catch cold" easily? Skin itches and burns? Nervous?

HOW MANY SYMPTOMS HAVE YOU?

For more than 45 years The Williams Treatment has been helping others to better health and comfort. You try it!

WANT A 75c BOTTLE?

Mail this advertisement with 10c in stamps or coin to The Dr. D. A. Williams Co., Offer M116, East Hampton, Conn. We will give uric acid sufferers who send this advertisement, home address and ten cents, one 75-cent bottle (32 doses) of The Williams Treatment and booklet with DIET and other helpful suggestions. No obligation. We pay postage. No C.O.D. Only one bottle given same person, family or address. Sold since 1892. **NO BOTTLE UNLESS THIS ADVT. IS SENT**



YOURS & BOYS! • GIRLS!

BIKE GIVEN

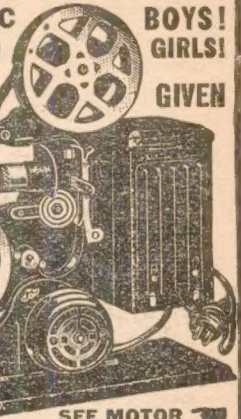
YOU CAN GET A Boy's or a Girl's Model Bicycle like this or big cash commission for **SIMPLY GIVING AWAY FREE** art pictures with our famous **WHITE CLOVERINE SALVE**, used for cuts, burns, chaps, sores, etc., which you sell to your friends at 25c a box (with art picture FREE) and remitting as per our new premium catalog and plan book. Many other premium offers in catalog. Our 42nd Year. We are fair and square! — Sell one or more boxes of **CLOVERINE SALVE** in most every home. Old Cloverine Agents order now. **SEND NO MONEY!** — We trust you. Be First! Begin now. **MAIL COUPON BELOW.**
WILSON CHEM. CO., INC.,
DEPT. SS-75, TYRONE, PA.

Balloon Tires

Headlight; Horn; Tool Box; Coaster Brake. Yes, fully equipped. Chromium parts. A Mead make. A brand new sporty bike for every ambitious boy or girl!

GIVEN ELECTRIC MOTOR Driven Movie Projector

New Premium! Fully equipped with electric motor. Baked crystal enamel. Accommodates 200 feet film, eight minute show—two empty reels. Tilting device for angle projection. Reverse rewind to top spool. Framar Reflector. **SPECIAL** bulb, cord and a plug. Size of picture 20 x 26 inches at a distance of ten feet from the screen. A Jim Dandy! Get one now! **FREE** 25 feet of Film valued at 75c included if you remit in 10 days! You can get this Projector easily by **SIMPLY GIVING AWAY FREE** art pictures with our famous **WHITE CLOVERINE SALVE**, used for cuts, burns, chaps, sores, etc., which you sell to your friends at 25c a box (with picture FREE) and remit as per our new premium plan catalog. Send no money. We trust you. Mail coupon. **Wilson Chem. Co. Inc. Dept. SS-75, Tyrone, Pa.**



BOYS! GIRLS! GIVEN

SEE MOTOR

GIVEN Floor Model RADIO or RIFLE

IVER JOHNSON 22-Cal. Bolt action self-cocking Safety RIFLE or a Genuine 5-tube AC Superheterodyne Floor Model Radio, long or short wave band, dynamic speaker—acropane dial. Striped walnut cabinet. 37 ins. high. An ornament to any home. **It's unusual.** Radio, Rifle or big cash commission yours for **SIMPLY GIVING AWAY FREE** art pictures with famous



WHITE CLOVERINE SALVE, used for burns, chaps, sores, etc., which you sell to friends at 25c a box (with picture FREE) and remit as per new big premium plan book! Our 42nd year. Be first.

WILSON Chem Co., INC.
Dept. SS-75, Tyrone, Pa.

Mail Coupon

GIVEN! Send No Money! Boys - Men - Women

1938 MODEL STREAMLINE AEROFLITE WAGON

A Beauty! A REAL COASTER WAGON —with a big streamlined all metal body, size 20x48, with 8 1/2 in. ball-bearing wheels and 1-inch rubber tires. Yours for **SIMPLY GIVING AWAY FREE** beautiful pictures with our famous **WHITE CLOVERINE SALVE** used for chaps, burns, etc., easily sold to friends at 25c a box (with picture Free) and remit as per our catalog. **WILSON CHEM CO., INC.** Dept. SS-75, Tyrone, Pa.



Send No Money!

Newest type steering
BE FIRST! MAIL COUPON NOW!

GIVEN

Big Guitar or BANJO or MICKEY MOUSE WATCH

Standard Size Guitar, regulated—fretted ebony finger-board, pearl position dots. —Tenor **BANJO** with 11 inch rim—16 flat top brackets—inlaid position, calf-skin head, patent pegs. See **Mickey Mouse** on the Dial of the watch! In colors, too! See the two charms on the bracelet. **WHAT A WATCH FOR BOYS AND GIRLS!** ... You can easily get a Guitar, Banjo, Watch or big cash commission by **SIMPLY GIVING AWAY FREE** beautiful colored Art Pictures with our famous **WHITE CLOVERINE SALVE** used for burns, chaps, sores, etc., which you sell to friends at 25c a box (with picture FREE) and remitting as per our new premium catalog. Many other valuable gifts. 42nd Year. We are reliable. **BE FIRST!**
Wilson Chem. Co. Inc.
Dept. SS-75, Tyrone, Pa.



We Trust You!

===== MAIL COUPON NOW! =====

WILSON CHEM. CO., Inc., Dept. SS-75, Tyrone, Pa. Date _____
Gentlemen:—Please send me 12 Beautiful Art Pictures with 12 boxes **WHITE CLOVERINE SALVE** to sell at 25c a box (giving picture FREE). I will remit within 30 days, select a premium or keep cash commission as per premium plan catalog sent with order, postage paid.

Name _____

R.D. _____ Bx _____ St. _____

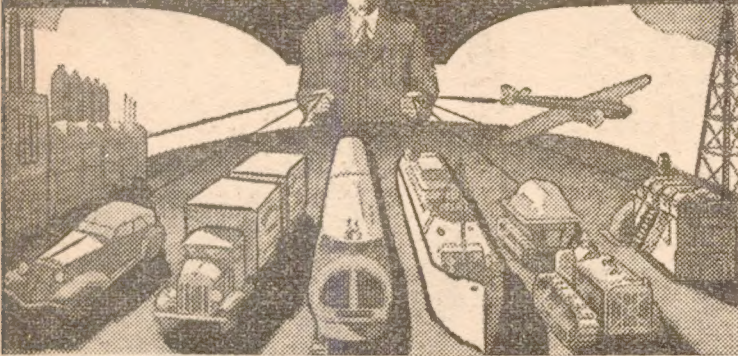
Town _____ State _____
PRINT YOUR LAST NAME ONLY IN SPACE BELOW

PASTE COUPON on a Penny Postcard or Mail in an Envelope Today!

TRY - WILSON'S - COUGH DROPS - 5¢ EVERYWHERE

Please mention this magazine when answering advertisements

The Diesel Engineer



Is Your Job Safe?

Just as the gasoline engine changed or wiped out the jobs of thousands who depended on horse-drawn vehicles for their living—just as electricity changed the entire set-up in the fields of light and power—so now the Diesel engine is fast invading both the power and transportation fields, and threatening the present jobs of thousands of workers.

To Men Over 18—Under 40:

This offer is NOT open to boys under 18 or men over 40. But if you are WITHIN these age limits, you owe it to yourself to investigate this unusual opportunity of acquainting yourself with a NEW field and a REAL future.

2 Diesel Lessons Free

Diesel—The New, Fast-Growing Power

Diesel engines are replacing steam and gasoline engines in power plants, motor trucks and buses, locomotives and ships, aircraft, tractors, dredges, pumps, etc.—opening up well-paid jobs for Diesel-trained men. You get all the latest Diesel developments in our course. Special diagrams for quick understanding of this new power. If jobs in your line are steadily growing scarcer, you owe it to yourself to investigate this new, progressive, uncrowded line, that in our opinion will offer good openings for the next 25 years.

American School, Dept. D-67, Drexel Avenue at 58th Street, Chicago, Illinois

Test Yourself for a Good Pay Job—Steady Work

Can You Learn Diesel?

If you are over 18 and under 40, we want to give you the opportunity of finding out. So, without obligation on your part, we will send you 2 beginning lessons. In your own home, look them over. See how clearly all is explained—how thoroughly you grasp every point—how definitely you progress step by step—so that your knowledge of Diesel grows constantly. This simple trial may be the turning point in your life—so write to us TODAY! State age.

GUARANTEED TIRES! FREE! LANTERN

GOODYEAR-GOODRICH FIRESTONE U.S. and Other Standard Makes
World's Lowest TIRE PRICES
Tire users by the thousands all over the U.S.A. vouch for the Long Hard Service of our Standard Brand tires reconditioned with high grade materials and latest methods by our tire experts. Our 21 years experience makes it possible to offer tires at lowest prices, with legal agreement to replace at 1/2 price any tire that fails to give 12 Mos. Service.

EVERY TIRE GUARANTEED!							
BALLOON TIRES				REGULAR CORD TIRES			
Size	Rim	Tires	Tube	Size	Rim	Tires	Tube
28x4.40-21	2.15	1.00		30x3.50-22	2.35	1.00	
28x4.50-20	2.35	1.00		30x4.00-20	2.55	1.00	
28x4.50-21	2.40	1.10		30x4.25-20	2.65	1.10	
28x4.75-19	2.45	1.20		30x4.50-19	2.75	1.20	
28x4.75-20	2.50	1.25		30x4.75-18	2.85	1.25	
28x5.00-19	2.65	1.25		30x5.00-18	2.95	1.25	
28x5.00-20	2.75	1.25		30x5.25-18	3.05	1.25	
28x5.25-19	2.85	1.30		30x5.25-20	3.15	1.30	
28x5.25-20	2.95	1.30		30x5.50-18	3.25	1.30	
28x5.50-19	3.05	1.35		30x5.50-20	3.35	1.35	
28x5.50-20	3.15	1.35		30x5.75-18	3.45	1.35	
28x5.75-19	3.25	1.40		30x5.75-20	3.55	1.40	
28x5.75-20	3.35	1.40		30x6.00-18	3.65	1.40	
28x6.00-19	3.45	1.45		30x6.00-20	3.75	1.45	
28x6.00-20	3.55	1.45		30x6.25-18	3.85	1.45	
28x6.25-19	3.65	1.50		30x6.25-20	3.95	1.50	
28x6.25-20	3.75	1.50		30x6.50-18	4.05	1.50	
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28x7.25-19	4.45	1.70		30x7.25-20	4.75	1.70	
28x7.25-20	4.55	1.70		30x7.50-18	4.85	1.70	
28x7.50-19	4.65	1.75		30x7.50-20	4.95	1.75	
28x7.50-20	4.75	1.75		30x7.75-18	5.05	1.75	
28x7.75-19	4.85	1.80		30x7.75-20	5.15	1.80	
28x7.75-20	4.95	1.80		30x8.00-18	5.25	1.80	
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28x8.00-20	5.15	1.85		30x8.25-18	5.45	1.85	
28x8.25-19	5.25	1.90		30x8.25-20	5.55	1.90	
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28x8.50-19	5.45	1.95		30x8.50-20	5.75	1.95	
28x8.50-20	5.55	1.95		30x8.75-18	5.85	1.95	
28x8.75-19	5.65	2.00		30x8.75-20	5.95	2.00	
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28x9.75-19	6.45	2.20		30x9.75-20	6.75	2.20	
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28x10.50-19	7.05	2.35		30x10.50-20	7.35	2.35	
28x10.50-20	7.15	2.35		30x10.75-18	7.45	2.35	
28x10.75-19	7.25	2.40		30x10.75-20	7.55	2.40	
28x10.75-20	7.35	2.40		30x11.00-18	7.65	2.40	
28x11.00-19	7.45	2.45		30x11.00-20	7.75	2.45	
28x11.00-20	7.55	2.45		30x11.25-18	7.85	2.45	
28x11.25-19	7.65	2.50		30x11.25-20	7.95	2.50	
28x11.25-20	7.75	2.50		30x11.50-18	8.05	2.50	
28x11.50-19	7.85	2.55		30x11.50-20	8.15	2.55	
28x11.50-20	7.95	2.55		30x11.75-18	8.25	2.55	
28x11.75-19	8.05	2.60		30x11.75-20	8.35	2.60	
28x11.75-20	8.15	2.60		30x12.00-18	8.45	2.60	
28x12.00-19	8.25	2.65		30x12.00-20	8.55	2.65	
28x12.00-20	8.35	2.65		30x12.25-18	8.65	2.65	
28x12.25-19	8.45	2.70		30x12.25-20	8.75	2.70	
28x12.25-20	8.55	2.70		30x12.50-18	8.85	2.70	
28x12.50-19	8.65	2.75		30x12.50-20	8.95	2.75	
28x12.50-20	8.75	2.75		30x12.75-18	9.05	2.75	
28x12.75-19	8.85	2.80		30x12.75-20	9.15	2.80	
28x12.75-20	8.95	2.80		30x13.00-18	9.25	2.80	
28x13.00-19	9.05	2.85		30x13.00-20	9.35	2.85	
28x13.00-20	9.15	2.85		30x13.25-18	9.45	2.85	
28x13.25-19	9.25	2.90		30x13.25-20	9.55	2.90	
28x13.25-20	9.35	2.90		30x13.50-18	9.65	2.90	
28x13.50-19	9.45	2.95		30x13.50-20	9.75	2.95	
28x13.50-20	9.55	2.95		30x13.75-18	9.85	2.95	
28x13.75-19	9.65	3.00		30x13.75-20	9.95	3.00	
28x13.75-20	9.75	3.00		30x14.00-18	10.05	3.00	
28x14.00-19	9.85	3.05		30x14.00-20	10.15	3.05	
28x14.00-20	9.95	3.05		30x14.25-18	10.25	3.05	
28x14.25-19	10.05	3.10		30x14.25-20	10.35	3.10	
28x14.25-20	10.15	3.10		30x14.50-18	10.45	3.10	
28x14.50-19	10.25	3.15		30x14.50-20	10.55	3.15	
28x14.50-20	10.35	3.15		30x14.75-18	10.65	3.15	
28x14.75-19	10.45	3.20		30x14.75-20	10.75	3.20	
28x14.75-20	10.55	3.20		30x15.00-18	10.85	3.20	
28x15.00-19	10.65	3.25		30x15.00-20	10.95	3.25	
28x15.00-20	10.75	3.25		30x15.25-18	11.05	3.25	
28x15.25-19	10.85	3.30		30x15.25-20	11.15	3.30	
28x15.25-20	10.95	3.30		30x15.50-18	11.25	3.30	
28x15.50-19	11.05	3.35		30x15.50-20	11.35	3.35	
28x15.50-20	11.15	3.35		30x15.75-18	11.45	3.35	
28x15.75-19	11.25	3.40		30x15.75-20	11.55	3.40	
28x15.75-20	11.35	3.40		30x16.00-18	11.65	3.40	
28x16.00-19	11.45	3.45		30x16.00-20	11.75	3.45	
28x16.00-20	11.55	3.45		30x16.25-18	11.85	3.45	
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28x16.25-20	11.75	3.50		30x16.50-18	12.05	3.50	
28x16.50-19	11.85	3.55		30x16.50-20	12.15	3.55	
28x16.50-20	11.95	3.55		30x16.75-18	12.25	3.55	
28x16.75-19	12.05	3.60		30x16.75-20	12.35	3.60	
28x16.75-20	12.15	3.60		30x17.00-18	12.45	3.60	
28x17.00-19	12.25	3.65		30x17.00-20	12.55	3.65	
28x17.00-20	12.35	3.65		30x17.25-18	12.65	3.65	
28x17.25-19	12.45	3.70		30x17.25-20	12.75	3.70	
28x17.25-20	12.55	3.70		30x17.50-18	12.85	3.70	
28x17.50-19	12.65	3.75		30x17.50-20	12.95	3.75	
28x17.50-20	12.75	3.75		30x17.75-18	13.05	3.75	
28x17.75-19	12.85	3.80		30x17.75-20	13.15	3.80	
28x17.75-20	12.95	3.80		30x18.00-18	13.25	3.80	
28x18.00-19	13.05	3.85		30x18.00-20	13.35	3.85	
28x18.00-20	13.15	3.85		30x18.25-18	13.45	3.85	
28x18.25-19	13.25	3.90		30x18.25-20	13.55	3.90	
28x18.25-20	13.35	3.90		30x18.50-18	13.65	3.90	
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28x18.50-20	13.55	3.95		30x18.75-18	13.85	3.95	
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28x19.25-20	14.15	4.10		30x19.50-18	14.45	4.10	
28x19.50-19	14.25	4.15		30x19.50-20	14.55	4.15	
28x19.50-20	14.35	4.15		30x19.75-18	14.65	4.15	
28x19.75-19	14.45	4.20		30x19.75-20	14.75	4.20	
28x19.75-20	14.55	4.20		30x20.00-18	14.85	4.20	
28x20.00-19	14.65	4.25		30x20.00-20	14.95	4.25	
28x20.00-20	14.75	4.25		30x20.25-18	15.05	4.25	
28x20.25-19	14.85	4.30		30x20.25-20	15.15	4.30	
28x20.25-20	14.95	4.30		30x20.50-18	15.25	4.30	
28x20.50-19	15.05	4.35		30x20.50-20	15.35	4.35	
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28x22.25-19	16.45	4.70		30x22.25-20	16.75	4.70	
28x22.25-20	16.55	4.70		30x22.50-18	16.85	4.70	
28x22.50-19	16.65	4.75		30x22.50-20	16.95	4.75	
28x22.50-20	16.75	4.75		30x22.75-18	17.05	4.75	
28x22.75-19	16.85	4.80		30x22.75-20	17.15	4.80	
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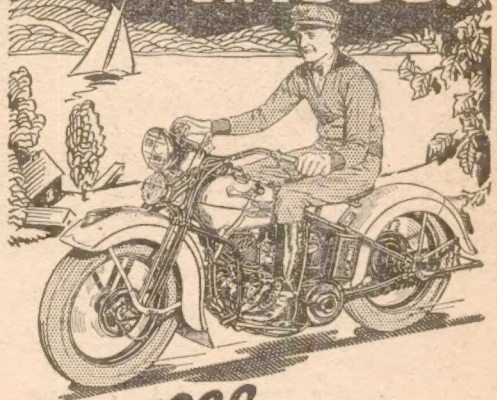
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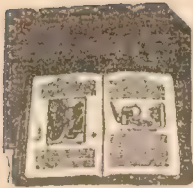
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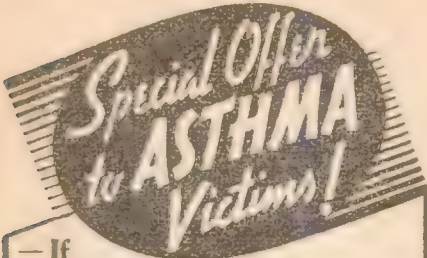
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HATRED HOUSE

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Author of "The Relentless Three," etc.

CHAPTER I.

A MALICIOUS WILL.



R. SPECK, of Speck, Marvin & Spencer, Counselors-at-Law, thoughtfully eyed the young woman who was occupying the chair beside his desk. The fact that she had lovely blond hair, blue eyes, and a deliciously curved mouth didn't interest Mr. Speck at all. What did interest him was her poise, her air of detachment and assurance. She appeared to be exactly the kind of a person that Mr.

Speck needed. Of course, it would have been better, everything considered, if she had been a man, still it——

"A most unfortunate matter," said Mr. Speck, putting all the sympathy of which he was capable into his voice. "I mean the Green Clover Dairy Products Co. going bankrupt just when you won the contest, Miss Croydon."

Kathleen Croydon frowned briefly. Mr. Speck was reminding her of one of the bitterest moments in her life. The Green Clover Dairy Products



"OPEN THE DOOR," SHE SAID THROUGH TIGHT LIPS.

Co. had conducted a contest through the newspapers; one of those affairs where one studies cartoons and from a given list of famous names selects the one name supposedly represented by the cartoon. There had been ninety-six pictures in all—one a day for almost four months—and Kathleen had labored hard over them. When the results were announced she was the winner of the grand prize of fifty thousand dollars. She had gotten a lot of publicity out of winning the contest, but not the fifty thousand dollars. The Green Clover Dairy Products Co. folded up a few days before the money was to be paid over, and greedy creditors had pounced down upon its assets, only to find that there were no assets.

"It must have been a great blow to you," said Mr. Speck, breaking

in on her thoughts; "a great blow."

"It was," Kathleen said gravely. "You see, I had a very special use for that money."

She didn't go on to explain the "very special use": the fact that she was the sole support of her young brother, Jimmy, a youngster who had had a very bad case of infantile paralysis and who must have treatments that she couldn't afford.

"You achieved the most astonishing result in that contest, Miss Croydon."

Kathleen looked a little bewildered. Surely Mr. Speck, of whom she had never heard until yesterday when she received his letter, hadn't summoned her to his office to compliment her on winning the contest. What did he want?

As if in answer to her question,

Mr. Speck reached into the center drawer of his desk and brought forth a piece of paper which he passed to Kathleen.

"What do you make of that?" he said.

Kathleen, looking down at the slip, saw four typewritten lines:

I men without me
The sailor's friend and one in every port
O' flight without light
As you seek I wish you no ill.

"I make nothing of it," she said.
"It just doesn't make sense."

Mr. Speck nodded his smallish head several times.

"I didn't expect you to, my dear; that is not right off the bat. You're quite right in saying that it doesn't make sense, but I'm hoping that it will make sense after you've had time to study it. That's the reason I sent for you. Those four lines contain a hidden meaning; a meaning that will mean millions to one of my clients and a great deal of money to you. When I read in the papers how you had won that contest, it struck me that you had a gift, real genius for solving things of this kind, and if anybody could read this message rightly, you could."

Kathleen wanted to laugh, but Mr. Speck was so palpably in earnest that she restrained herself.

"Would you care to make a little sure money and perhaps a great deal?" he asked.

"I'm out of a job," Kathleen said. Even if she got only twenty-five dollars for working on Mr. Speck's little puzzle, it would help, she reflected.

"In that case," Mr. Speck asserted, "my proposition ought to interest you. Have you ever heard of Pearsonville? No? It's some sixty miles out of New York—a fair-sized town

where my client, Mr. Judah Glayden lives. I should like you to go there; stay at the house for a week, until you have solved the secret of this little message."

Kathleen Croydon gazed at Mr. Speck wide-eyed.

"Mr. Judah Glayden? What an odd name!"

"I don't mind telling you," Mr. Speck continued, "that those four lines on that slip in your hand are part of a will. If correctly read they will disclose the hiding place of a fortune. A real fortune. Millions in negotiable securities. It was Mr. Glayden's, my client's idea that being on the premises might help you to solve the puzzle. You see, the securities are either hidden in the house or about the grounds."

Kathleen Croydon's wide blue eyes suddenly hardened.

"And did Mr. Glayden have any other ideas?" she demanded.

Mr. Speck looked shocked.

"My dear young woman," he said imploringly, "please don't have any such ideas. Mr. Glayden is a respectable married man over fifty, living with his wife. There are other people in the house, too; Mr. Glayden's brother-in-law, Mr. Silas Sneed. You needn't be afraid of Mr. Sneed either; he's bedridden, paralyzed from the waist down. Then there's Doctor Lombardy, Mr. Silas Sneed's personal physician, living there and—and— Well, you will be perfectly safe. Besides, Messrs. Speck, Marvin & Spencer are not the sort of a firm——" Mr. Speck broke off abruptly, his voice choked with indignation.

"I'm sorry," Kathleen said contritely, "but you must admit that the whole business sounds a little fishy."

"It does; it does," Mr. Speck agreed in a mollified tone. "And I

don't mind telling you that the inmates of the house to which I am sending you are a trifle—a trifle eccentric. But you won't mind that considering the fee, and the great possibilities."

"What is the fee—and the possibilities?"

"I'll pay you one hundred dollars down plus expenses," said Mr. Speck. "You're to stay one week at the house, concentrating on this little problem I am giving you. At the end of that week you will receive an additional four hundred dollars—even if you fail."

"And if I succeed?"

Mr. Speck leaned forward across his desk fixing Kathleen with glittering eyes.

"If you succeed," he breathed, "you will get one hundred thousand dollars!"

Kathleen Croydon gasped. A hundred thousand dollars! Unconsciously she stared down at the paper in her hands. Her eyes caught the first line again. It made no sense at all, but perhaps it might upon careful study. A hundred thousand dollars was a lot of money; enough to see her brother Jimmy through all the treatments he would require, and a lot more.

"For some inexplicable reason, Mr. Judah Glayden and I have a feeling that you can solve this puzzle, if anybody can," Mr. Speck continued. "If a more detailed explanation of the situation will persuade you to undertake this commission I'll give it to you. The fortune which I am trying to locate was left by Abner Sneed, who died last year. Abner Sneed wasn't insane when he made his will—not legally at least—but he had a quaint sense of humor. He hated all his relatives; hated them bitterly; just why doesn't matter. He took this means of torturing

them—of getting even. They know the money is there. They know he's given them a clew to where the money is located, yet they can't find it. Could anything be more tantalizing? What's more, the money being hidden there, is forcing them to live together, watching each other, distrusting and hating each other."

"Why shouldn't they want to live together? I should think they'd want to help each other find the money."

"Abner Sneed thought of that. I told you in the beginning that these people were a little eccentric. Perhaps I should say that with the exception of my client, Mr. Glayden, they are not quite normal. They have always hated each other but that hatred has been intensified a thousand times by old Abner Sneed's will. You see, whoever finds the money gets half of it; the rest is divided between the others, including a butler, an old retainer of Abner Sneed's. Let us suppose that Silas Sneed, crippled and bedridden though he is, were to find those securities. He can't bear the thought that he'll have to give half of it to the others, and the others can't bear the idea that he would get so much more than they. So they watch each other night and day, for fear that one of them might find that hoard and sneak off with it. Of course Silas Sneed is pretty helpless, but he's got Doctor Lombardy. I think that he keeps Lombardy on just to look out for his interests. It must be understood that if you discover the cryptic meaning in that message, that you will impart the information only to my client, Mr. Glayden, and not the others.

"Here is an agreement," Mr. Speck said, "guaranteeing you your payments, as outlined. You will note that it is properly signed by Mr.

Glayden and his wife, Matilda Glayden, and witnessed. You have nothing to lose and a fortune to gain."

"When do I go to Mr. Glayden's?"

"It isn't really Mr. Glayden's house," said Mr. Speck. "It belongs to all of them jointly. Old Abner Sneed left it to them that way, figuring that they'd have to live together and keep on hating each other." Mr. Speck reached into his pocket and brought forth a railroad ticket clipped to some bills. "The next train leaves at eight o'clock to-night. Here's your ticket and a hundred dollars. The sooner you get there the better; there's always the risk that one of the others might get ahead of us. Not Silas—he's confined to his bed—but Doctor Lombardy for instance, or Disk, the butler. Disk is shrewd. If he got his hands on the securities first, none of the others would get their share."

Mr. Speck held the ticket and money toward Kathleen.

She hesitated for many seconds before she reached out and took them. She studied Mr. Speck long and silently. There was nothing sinister about Mr. Speck, she decided. He was just a commonplace little man eager to have her undertake this job. She held out her hand for the agreement he had drawn up and put that along with the ticket and the money in her purse.

"I'll be on the eight o'clock train to-night," she said quietly.

CHAPTER II.

A CRY IN THE NIGHT.

THE train, a local, didn't get to Pearsonville until a little after ten. Kathleen Croydon stood on the platform peering through the darkness for a porter or a taxi. Presently a slouching figure came toward her.

"Taxi, ma'am?"

"Yes," Kathleen said.

The driver picked up her bag and started for his car. When he got there he stopped and asked, "where to?"

"The Sneed place."

"The Sneed place! You goin' to the Sneed place?"

There was an odd note in the man's voice, and in a flash of lightening Kathleen saw an equally strange look on his face.

"Any reason why I shouldn't go there?"

"No, there ain't," the man said slowly. "Not if you want to go there." He held the door open for her.

"What's wrong with the Sneed place?" she demanded with characteristic directness.

"Nothin'," the man mumbled. "It's just that people around here say that they're kinda queer up there."

Kathleen, her heart beating a little faster, got into the cab. She told herself that she mustn't at the very outset allow herself to be upset by the small-town gossip of a cab driver. She settled back against the cushions and tried to think of something else. Always her mind went back to that cryptic message from old Abner Sneed's will that Mr. Speck had given her. She had puzzled over it all the way down without success and now she couldn't restrain the thought that perhaps it had no meaning at all, that it was just a hoax, a pretext to lure her down here to some lonely house. Panic seized her, but she fought it off.

The cab came to a stop with a jerk. The driver climbed out and opened the door. "Here you are, miss."

Kathleen remained where she was. There was still time for her to turn back. She could tell the man to

take her to some hotel and come back in the morning. The house was a long rambling structure, higher in the middle than at the wings. Kathleen sensed, rather than saw, the general air of desolation about it. It was in complete darkness, save for a faint light above the front door. Kathleen turned to the driver to tell him to take her back, when the front door opened.

A tall, powerfully built man emerged. He came to the cab and took Kathleen's bag from the driver, in an unbelievably deep hollow voice he said:

"This way, miss."

As though hypnotized, scarcely realizing that she was abandoning her idea of going back to town, Kathleen followed him into the hallway. Here the man paused, turned with a sort of deadly deliberation, and took her in from head to foot. He had a decidedly unpleasant face; not that there was anything vicious about it—at least not then. It was just that it was an unhealthy face, broad, flat, and dead-white. In strange contrast, almost black eyes glowed steadily at her.

"I'm Kathleen Croydon," she said a little desperately. "Mr. Glayden wanted me for a secretary." Mr. Speck had told her to say that.

"I'm Disk, the butler," the man said in a tone more sepulchral than ever. "Mr. Glayden has retired, but he is expecting you. I'll show you to your room."

The house was ominously quiet as Kathleen followed Disk up the broad wooden stairs; so silent that the girl wondered if the pounding of her heart were audible. On the next floor Disk led the way along the hall to a door at the left which he opened. He fumbled for a switch, found it, and Kathleen discovered herself in a fair-sized room mod-

estly furnished. But something about the room made her gasp. It was a wreck; the floorboards had been torn up and were now only partly replaced; the baseboards along the entire walls had been ripped away and there were holes in the plaster of the walls.

"The house is somewhat in disrepair," Disk said without a trace of emotion. "You will have to watch your step."

Kathleen shrank back. It wasn't the man's words, but the way he looked at her, devouring her blond loveliness with his eyes. A horrible thought flashed in her brain. What if she were alone in this house with Disk?

"I think that will be all, Disk," she said, and somehow managed to keep her voice level.

"Very good, miss," Disk bowed. "You'll be quite safe."

His eyes traveled toward the door, and Kathleen saw two enormous bolts on the inside.

"All the doors in this house are fitted like that," Disk explained.

His voice was still hollow, but Kathleen thought that she detected a faintly ironic note in it. But before she could say anything more Disk had gone, shutting the door softly behind him.

Alone, Kathleen stood for a moment where she was, surveying herself in the mirror of the dressing table. Her face was white, almost as white as Disk's. If only the house weren't filled with that unearthly stillness. Yet if she moved, the loosely replaced floorboards underfoot creaked in a way that frightened her. What a fool she had been to come here! But the condition of her room, the holes in the wall, the loose boards on the floor and the baseboards torn from the walls, was reassuring; it bore out what Mr.

Speck had told her: there were people here who really believed that there was a fortune concealed in this house; they had made an obvious effort to locate it.

Slowly Kathleen began to take off her things; she would go to bed and see what to-morrow would bring. She got into her pajamas, and was about to put out the light when it occurred to her to lock the bolts on the door. Suddenly she stood still, rooted to the spot, her heart going like mad. She was certain there was some one outside the door. She listened intently without hearing a sound. For minutes she stood there—minutes that seemed like hours. Then she tiptoed forward, took hold of the knob gently, turned it noiselessly, and summoning all her courage, yanked the door open. She had been right. The butler was there kneeling on the floor.

"What are you doing here?" she blazed.

Disk's pale lips moved. He was about to speak, but something happened to interrupt him. The unearthly stillness of that desolate house was broken by a weird cry. It was a high-pitched, shrill, whimpering cry, but stronger than a child's.

Disk stiffened. He turned his head right and left looking up and down the hall. The next instant he was gone.

Kathleen, her pulses throbbing, went to the door and peered out. Even with the aid of the faint light that came from her room, she could at first see nothing. Then at the other end, near the stairs, a door opened, and framed against the light from another room a woman in a loose wrapper stood silhouetted. Indistinctly, Kathleen made out her face—a narrow face with a sharp nose and a long, pointed chin. The woman stood rigid as a statue, in a

listening attitude. Once more there came that cry, shorter, more feeble this time. Then the sound of scuffling steps overhead. The woman started for the stairs, changed her mind, and stood still. Endless minutes went by. Kathleen wondered if the woman would ever turn and see her standing there. But she didn't. Presently, there came the tread of heavy feet coming down from the floor above. A man came up to the woman. He was a medium-sized, stocky individual, thick about the middle.

"You beat him," the woman said accusingly.

"Claude, the little beast," the man snarled in a coarse voice, "some one let him out. Not only that, but look what he had." The man held out his hand, palm upward. There was an object in it that looked to Kathleen like a knife; a knife with a long, thin black handle and a short, narrow, keen blade.

"You didn't have to beat him, did you?" the woman wailed. She hesitated, then, "I wouldn't care if he had killed *him*."

"Him? You mean you wouldn't care if Claude killed Silas? It wasn't in front of Silas's door that I found him, it was in front of *ours*."

"Just the same you didn't have to beat him," the woman persisted doggedly. "You could have——"

The door opposite to the woman's room opened. A tall man came out.

"What the devil is going on here, Judah?" he demanded in a strong, resonant voice.

Kathleen started. So the man who was holding the knife was Judah Glayden, her employer.

Judah Glayden turned to face the newcomer. He held out the knife.

"Is this yours, Doctor Lombardy?" he rasped.

Doctor Lombardy reached over,

and with thumb and forefinger picked the object off Judah's palm and held it up to the light for a closer scrutiny.

"I can't say," he declared.

"It looks to me like a surgeon's knife; a scalpel," Judah went on harshly, "like the knife that killed Minton."

"That's what it does all right," Doctor Lombardy said. "Just the same, I don't know whether or not this one is mine. I've got dozens of these things in my case."

Judah Glayden, almost a head shorter than Doctor Lombardy, went closer and stuck his face up at Doctor Lombardy.

"Some one let Claude loose," he said, his voice now tense, "and gave him this. Was it you?"

Doctor Lombardy ran a tongue across his lips and said:

"Don't be a damn fool. Why would I?"

Suddenly aware of the partly open door where Kathleen was standing, Doctor Lombardy motioned with his head, and Judah turned and stared at her. Even at that distance, Kathleen could make out that Judah had great, round, protruding eyes, could see his thick-lipped mouth fixed in a snarl. For a moment no one moved. Then Judah, followed by the others, started toward her. Kathleen fought off an impulse to cry out, to retreat into her room and bolt the door. She decided to hold her ground and face the situation.

"I'm afraid we've disturbed you, Miss Croydon," Judah said. He was trying to make his coarse voice sound ingratiating.

"I thought I heard a noise," Kathleen said.

Judah Glayden was trying to smile at her, trying to convert the perpetual snarl on his puffy lips into a grin, and the effect was ghastly.

"Your new secretary, eh?" Doctor Lombardy said.

Judah Glayden half turned and dragged the woman at his side forward.

"This, Miss Croydon, is my wife, Matilda," he introduced.

Kathleen said, "How do you do, Mrs. Glayden," and found herself looking into a hard, implacable face; a face that had a relentless, determined expression, yet a frustrated look, too, as though the woman had spent her life heading toward a goal she hadn't yet achieved. Her small, thin mouth moved, but no words came forth.

"I'm sorry that you should have been disturbed on your first night here," Judah said. "It was nothing of any consequence."

"It was nothing at all," Doctor Lombardy said ironically, "nothing at all."

"Why don't we let her go to bed," Matilda said in a hard, unfriendly tone.

"Of course, of course," Judah agreed. "This young lady will need her sleep. We have a lot of hard work ahead of us, haven't we?" He gave a broad wink that made Kathleen shudder inwardly, and started herding his two companions toward the other end of the hall.

Kathleen, her voice faint, managed to say, "Good night."

She shot the bolts and sank onto the bed. For a time she lay there staring at the ceiling with wide, frightened eyes. This was a madhouse. She had always thought of herself as being courageous, but there were limits even to her courage. She couldn't stand that beast of a butler; couldn't stand, Judah Glayden, nor Matilda with that merciless look on her face. She was afraid of Doctor Lombardy who, with all his suave and polished man-

ner, was underneath no different than Disk. And what was the meaning of that weird cry she had heard? That must have come from the one they called Claude. And Matilda had accused her husband of beating Claude. Who was Claude, and why was he locked up, and what did he want with a knife, a surgeon's knife?

Kathleen Croydon crawled under the sheets and closed her eyes.

CHAPTER III.

TRAPPED!

KATHLEEN woke late the next morning. She looked at herself in the mirror and saw the ravages of a sleepless night. There were circles under her eyes, a drawn look to her cheeks. She did her best with powder, rouge, and lipstick, but the results were none too satisfactory. Then she packed her bag. She snapped the suitcase shut, put on her hat, went to the door, drew back the bolts and slipped into the hall. Then she got a shock. Doctor Lombardy was there waiting for her.

He studied her for a moment in silence. "Leaving, I see. Perhaps it's just as well, but I wonder if before you left you couldn't step in for a few minutes to see my patient, Mr. Silas Sneed. I told him about your being here. He's a very sick man—confined to his bed—paralyzed from the waist down. I think you will like him." Doctor Lombardy spoke easily, casually. In broad daylight he appeared a less sinister figure.

Kathleen had no desire to talk to Silas Sneed. The sooner she got out of this place the better. Yet she didn't wish to precipitate an argument. She followed Doctor Lombardy down the hall to a door next to his, which he opened. The shades

were partly drawn; the room was in semidarkness; but the features of the man in bed with his head propped up on a pillow were plainly visible. It was an emaciated face with high cheek bones, a broad forehead, curiously veiled eyes, and a sensitive mouth. Silas Sneed's hair was gray, long, and straggly. Somehow it contrived to make him look utterly helpless. He turned his head halfway to look at her and after a while in a wisp of a voice said:

"So you're Judah's new secretary." Then he laughed softly.

"I'm leaving," Kathleen said. "I don't—I don't think I'm suited to the position."

Silas Sneed nodded feebly several times. "This house, my child," he said, "is no place for you, and my brother-in-law has no need of a secretary. This is a house of hate. The Sneeds have always hated each other," he explained in a rambling way, "and when Judah came into the family and married Matilda, my sister, because he thought that some day she would be rich, we hated him, and he hated us. When my father married again a few years ago, Judah made common cause with us in hating father because he saw Matilda's inheritance slipping away from him, going to father's new wife." Silas plucked nervously with thin fingers at the bed covers. "We hated father's wife most of all," he resumed after a minute. "She was a frail, pretty little thing; sickly, too. I guess she couldn't stand living here. I guess we made her life a living hell. Father was always a stubborn man. He should have taken her away, but he didn't. He was bound that she should be mistress of this house, that I and Matilda and her husband knuckle down to her. It used to make my brother Minton squirm, because father's new wife

was in charge of the household finances and used to dole out his allowance to him. You see we were all dependent on father—Matilda and Glayden, Minton and I.

"Things got so bad in this house, that not even I could stand it. So I went away and lived in New York. Father came to see me there once. He came to tell me that his wife had died. He said that Matilda, Judah, and my brother Minton had killed her. I was never able to get out of him whether he meant that literally or not, but I still remember the way he looked when he said it. 'They want my money,' he said, 'and you do, too. Well, they can fight for it when I'm gone, and if you want your share, you'd better go back there when I'm dead.' I did come back a year later, after father had died, but something had happened to me. I'd had a stroke, and Lombardy brought me here in a wheel chair." His eyes grew more clouded. "The Sneeds have always hated each other," he declared in a distant way, "and everybody that's ever come into the family. Strangely enough I could never hate father's second wife."

Kathleen stirred uncomfortably. "I must be going," she said.

Silas Sneed paid no attention to her. "My brother, Minton," he went on, "died a few months ago. He committed suicide. Lombardy will tell you that. Though there was a stupid policeman here, a Captain Toll, who thought that he was murdered. But the district attorney, Heinemann, took a more reasonable point of view." Silas laughed again softly. "The Sneeds are an old family," he said. "They still have some influence and a little money."

"I believe there's an early train," Kathleen ventured, "that I can just catch."

"Have I told you about Claude? Claude is a very interesting character." Silas Sneed's eyes flickered. The singsong quality in his thin voice made Kathleen shiver.

"I've got to go," she said, "I've got to!"

He turned his head a little, so as to face her more fully.

"Of course," he said. "Your coming here was a waste of time in the first place. My brother-in-law's lawyer, Speck, sent you, didn't he? When Lombardy told me your name was Croydon, I saw it all right away. You see, I read the papers a great deal, having nothing much else to do, and I recognized you as the girl who had won the contest. And Judah thought you could solve the secret of father's will. You can't. Nobody can, unless—unless it's me." He braced himself on his elbows and managed to raise his head. A fanatical light came into his eyes. "I've got the first and third lines—the first and third lines!" For seconds Silas held himself so, tense, his thin face flushed with excitement, then he dropped back and in a weary tone added: "the second and fourth lines——"

Kathleen waited breathlessly, momentarily carried away by an unconscious excitement. She wanted him to go on. The puzzle of that will intrigued her. If he could tell her what the first and third lines meant, perhaps she could solve the meaning of the rest. It was odd how important, how momentous, the thing seemed just then, even to the point of making her forget that she wanted to get away from here and never wanted to see the place again.

"What does——" she began, then stopped.

"There's danger in this house," Silas whispered in an awesome tone. "Go away! Go away!"

Then it dawned on Kathleen why he had sent for her, why he had spoken to her so freely. He wanted to frighten her. He was afraid that she might solve the problem of old Abner Sneed's will and might give the solution to Judah Glayden.

Old Silas Sneed lay back on his pillows; his eyes were shut; his restless hands were still. The awful thought came to her that he had died right there before her eyes. Then she heard Doctor Lombardy's voice.

"He's asleep," Lombardy said suavely. "It tires him to think of that puzzle. He's got the first and third lines. Imagine that! Perhaps if you were to stay——"

He placed his hand lightly on her shoulder, but she shook it off with a feeling of revulsion. She picked up her bag and, without a word, went out of the door and down the hall.

On the floor below Kathleen made straight for the front door. She took hold of the knob, turned and pulled it quickly. The door wouldn't budge. It was locked, and there was no key in the lock. She couldn't for the moment grasp the idea that it had been locked on purpose, that she could possibly be held a prisoner here. She simply thought that it had been locked for the night and nobody had as yet thought to open it. She turned a little irritably, just in time to see Judah Glayden coming toward her.

"Good morning," he said, trying to force his fat lips into a smile.

"The door is locked," Kathleen said. "Would you mind opening it, or having it opened? I'm leaving."

"I know it's locked," Judah said. "I'm surprised, Miss Croydon, that you would think of breaking our agreement—the agreement you made with my lawyer, Mr. Speck—to stay

here at least a week until that ingenious mind of yours has found the secret of my father's will. You've already been paid a hundred dollars."

"You can have it back," Kathleen said furiously.

Judah Glayden shook his head.

"I'd rather have you stay here," he declared doggedly, "and tackle the job for which you were hired."

Kathleen looked at him askance, as the meaning of her position slowly dawned on her. "You mean that you would forcibly detain me, keep me from leaving this house?"

"Certainly." Judah dropped all pretense of friendliness. A brutish look came into his purple, blotched face. His lips dropped back into their habitual sneer. "You're going to solve this thing," he snarled, "if I have to hammer it out of you."

The suitcase slipped out of Kathleen's hands and clattered to the floor. The clasp sprung open, the cover fell back, and Kathleen, looking down saw the revolver on top. She stooped down quickly, snatched it up and pointed the barrel at Judah.

"Open the door," she said through tight lips.

For a minute it looked as though Judah wouldn't budge. His great protruding eyes seemed to stick farther out of his head. His complexion grew more livid, then he relaxed and said:

"Very well, my dear, if you insist." He reached into his pocket and started for the door.

Kathleen turned, keeping her eyes on him, following him with the revolver—and then it happened. An excruciating stab of pain shot through her arm clear up to her shoulder. The revolver whirled into space. Disk had come up noiselessly behind her, had struck her sharply across the wrist with his fist.

"Very good, Disk," Judah said. He bent down and picked up the gun. "Much too large for a little girl like you, Miss Croyden," he declared, once more genial. "And now if you will go into the dining room and have breakfast, we will forget all about this little unpleasantness, and afterward we will set to work."

In a daze, without actually realizing her position, Kathleen followed Disk to a room at the rear, where a place was set for her at a round table. The room had the same appearance of having been torn to pieces. Originally it had been papered with grass cloth. Every inch of that had been stripped off. The floor boards had been torn up and replaced none too expertly. The mantel over the fireplace had been taken down. There was no doubt about it, the room had been subjected to a thorough search. Briefly, Kathleen's mind was diverted from her own plight by what she saw. Then she beheld bars on the windows and the position she was in came back to her. She wondered, too, why there should be bars on the windows. Surely they hadn't been put there just for her benefit. Were they put there to keep some one from getting in or some one from getting out? Her thoughts went back to the night before and Judah Glayden's reference to some one named Claude. Some one had turned Claude loose!

She scarcely noticed that Disk had placed food before her, yet she managed to choke down a few mouthfuls and drink the coffee beside her plate. Subconsciously, she noted that Disk never took his eyes off her every minute he was in the room. Once, he bent down to serve her and she could feel his hot breath on the back of her neck.

"Beg pardon, miss," Disk said, his pasty flat face expressionless. "I

just happened to think that you and I could work together on this."

Kathleen stared at him frigidly, pretending not to understand.

"I know why you're here, Miss Croyden," Disk said. "Butlers overhear things. People get so used to them they forget that they are around, and they talk. If you were to find out where it's hidden and wouldn't tell anybody but me, I'd make it worth your while. Old Mr. Sneed didn't really play fair with me. He should have left me something outright. I was his friend. I looked out for his missus as best I could."

Kathleen rose, prepared to leave, but Disk barred the way.

"If any of the others get their hands on that money, I'll never see a penny of it. They're that sort—mean and selfish and greedy. Now you look like some one who can be trusted. We could go off together; we could be happy together with all that money. If we work it right, nobody would ever know that we found it."

Kathleen, white and shaky, her eyes blazing, stared at him. She lashed out and struck him across the cheek. Disk stepped back, his face a dirty-gray save for the marks that Kathleen's hand had left. He made an odd noise deep down in his throat and glared at her, his long, yellow teeth bared. She stepped past him and went out. He made no effort to detain her.

CHAPTER IV.

THE HANDY MAN.

SHE went along the hall to a partly open door. She heard the sounds of hammering. Without purpose, she pushed the door open and looked inside. It was the library. A young man was

busy picking his way between piles of books that littered the floor; he was putting back bookcases that had been torn from the walls, nailing back panels. He turned when he heard her come in and said "Hello" in a pleasant, friendly tone. It was like a breath of fresh air to see some one like that in this house. He had a frank, smiling good-looking face.

Kathleen said "Hello."

"You're new here, aren't you?" the young man said.

Kathleen nodded.

"I've only been here a couple of months myself," he said.

"Are you a carpenter?"

The young man laughed. "Not exactly. I work about the place, doing odd jobs and things, trying to make enough money to finish my law course this fall. I'm a sort of a handy man. They pay good wages. Most people don't like to work here; seem to think Mr. Sneed and the Glaydens are kind of queer. People in town say there's been a murder here." He sobered for a moment. "I guess they are a bit queer," he said reflectively. "For one thing, they take this place apart faster than I could put it together."

The young man was eyeing her sharply. "Anything the matter?" he asked. "You looked sort of white and scared. Don't mind what I just told you." Inconsequentially, he added, "My name's Dick Snowden."

Kathleen said, "Could you—could you get me out of this place?"

He stared at her blankly, too amazed to take in the import of her words.

"What do you mean—could I get you out of this place?"

"The front door is locked," she said. "They won't let me go."

"But why not?" His amazement mounted. "What are you doing here anyway?"

For seconds she stood there considering before she decided to tell him. After all, what harm could it do? Everybody in the house seemed to know her mission here. When she had finished her story, Dick Snowden said:

"Well, I'll be damned." There was at first disbelief in his eyes, then anger, as he realized that she had told him the truth. "They've got a hell of a nerve," he said, "trying to hold you a prisoner—a girl like you." He looked thoughtful. "You say the butler has got a gun—your gun. And then there's Glayden to contend with and this Lombardy, if I try to get you out of here by force. But there's an easier way than that. When I get through here they won't stop me from going out. I sleep in the old coachman's house over on the left, and the minute I'm out of here I'll hot-foot it down to town and get the police. There's an old codger down there, a fellow they call Captain Toll. He won't mind coming up here with a good excuse. He wasn't satisfied a few months back that Minton Sneed committed suicide. Don't you worry, you'll be safe enough until I get back with Captain Toll and his Cossacks."

He reached out and gave her hand a little squeeze, just a reassuring, boyish gesture, and she liked it.

Just then Judah Glayden came in. His round, popping eyes darted from one to the other, searchingly.

"Until further notice, Snowden," he said, "you'll take up your quarters in the house. There's a room in the attic you can use."

"All right, sir," Dick Snowden said. He gave Kathleen a quick, reassuring glance that told her not to worry; that he'd fix things somehow, even though Glayden had prevented him from carrying out his original plan.

"And now, Miss Croydon," Glayden said, "we'll get at that little job you have undertaken. If there's anything I can tell you that might assist you——"

"No, I'll do better if I work alone."

"Then perhaps you'd like to go back to your room?"

Kathleen, her mind working swiftly, said:

"No. I have an idea that it's something in connection with this room," she lied shamelessly. "This young man can help me. I may want some measurements made. I've got an idea." She paused, and then to convince Judah that she was keeping his secret, went close to him and whispered in his ear, "I think it's a formula—a mathematical formula."

Judah Glayden nodded.

"All right," he said, "I'll just make myself comfortable in this armchair and if you need any additional help I——"

"I'd rather you wouldn't," she insisted. "You'll only distract me. It's complicated enough as it is. I won't mind this young man. I won't notice him. But with you, it's different. I can't have you sitting over me every minute, taking my mind off what I am doing."

Judah looked hesitant, and again divided a suspicious glance between Kathleen and Dick Snowden.

"All right," he said after a while. He started for the door and stopped. "You're here of your own free will, Miss Croydon, aren't you? You have a contract to do a certain job for me; a contract that's good for a week, haven't you?"

"Of course," Kathleen said.

Dick Snowden, who stood there trying to keep his expression wooden, grinned when the door closed behind Judah.

"Nice work, kid," he whispered.

"But what good will it do us?"

Kathleen asked helplessly. It was funny how that "us" slipped out so unconsciously, so naturally.

"Don't worry," Dick Snowden said, "I'm full of ideas and I'll be around to-night in my stockinged feet. Don't forget I'm handy with tools. It won't be much of a trick for me to get those bars off one of the windows when it's dark, and no one's around to watch me." He stopped, struck by a sudden idea. "Say, suppose you were to tell Glayden that you solved that little puzzle of old Abner Sneed's will, but that you won't give him the answer; that you'll only tell this lawyer who hired you, then they'd have to let you out of here. How's that for an idea?" he demanded with elation. Then his face fell. "I guess that wouldn't be so good. They'd probably try to force it out of you, and I guess they wouldn't be very pleasant about it."

"I guess they wouldn't," Kathleen agreed with a little shiver.

Dick Snowden picked up his hammer and started driving a few nails to give the impression that he was working, in the event that any one was listening. After a time, he put down the hammer and said:

"Let's see that slip the lawyer gave you. Might as well do that to pass the time as anything else. I used to be pretty good at puzzles."

Kathleen took the slip from her purse and passed it to him. He read it over a dozen times:

I men without me
The sailor's friend and one in every port
O' flight without light
As you seek I wish you no ill.

He frowned and scowled, then unexpectedly his face cleared, and he grinned at Kathleen.

"You say the old crippled boy upstairs told you he knew what the

first and third lines meant? Well, so do I." He kept his voice low, but there was faint exultation in it.

"What do they mean?" Kathleen couldn't help showing a little chagrined.

"What's 'men' without 'me'?" Dick Snowden said. "Why it's nothing but an 'n.' Look, I'll show you." He found a scrap of paper, a stub of a pencil and wrote the first line for her:

I (me)n without me

"Now you take that 'n' and put it together with the 'i' and you have 'in.' Perfectly simple," he bragged good-naturedly. "Now you take the third line:

"O' flight without light."

"You don't have to tell me," said Kathleen. "I can see it now 'Flight' without 'light' is nothing but an 'f,' and you put it with the 'o' and you have 'of.' But what about the second and fourth lines?"

"There you've got me," Dick Snowden said ruefully. "What's a sailor's friend? It could be anything; tobacco, liquor, a star, a lighthouse. Gosh I don't know. 'One in every port,' of course means a girl. And as for the last line, that leaves me absolutely stumped." He remained crestfallen for a few moments, until his natural high spirits reasserted themselves again, "Say, wouldn't it be great if we solved this thing, and Glayden really kept his word. Think of the fun we could have, or rather you could have, with a hundred thousand."

She smiled at him. "Half of it would be yours now," she declared. "You've already solved half the puzzle."

He started to shake his head, then grew unexpectedly rigid. The door

opened softly. Judah Glayden stood there.

"So you've already solved half the puzzle," Judah said, his bulging eyes glowing. "How far have you got?"

"Never mind how far we've got," Dick snapped. "When we've solved the rest of it, we may tell you."

Judah walked slowly to where Kathleen stood. He seized her wrist and gave it a nasty wrench.

"How far have you got?" he demanded hoarsely.

Kathleen said nothing.

Judah twisted her arm more savagely. Kathleen winced, and despite herself a little cry escaped her.

"What have you found out?"

Dick Snowden looked at Kathleen. He saw the agony in her eyes and didn't waste a moment. His fist shot out, caught the shorter, bulky man flush on the jaw, sending him reeling, and making him release his grip on the girl.

"Disk," Judah screamed. "Disk! Help! Come here!"

The sliding doors at the far end of the room that opened into the dining room parted. The butler came in. Kathleen's gun was in his hand, the barrel pointed at Dick Snowden.

"Did you call, sir?" There was mocking deference in Disk's voice.

Judah, rubbing his marked jaw, said:

"They've solved half of the puzzle, Disk," and added irrelevantly, "He hit me."

Disk, his face unreadable, said: "Are you and I in on this together, Mr. Glayden?"

Judah Glayden hesitated only a minute. "Yes," he said, "you and I, Disk. It's ours, it's ours—if we get the secret out of them. Go around behind him, Disk. Let him have it if he makes a move."

The butler stepped back of Dick

Snowden and poked the barrel of the gun hard between the latter's shoulder blades.

Kathleen thought she had never seen a more vicious expression on a man's face as the one that came into Judah's now. She knew what was coming and wasn't surprised when Judah, his bulging eyes gleaming, stepped up to Dick Snowden and struck him in the mouth with his clenched fist. Dick Snowden took it, smiling without mirth. He didn't dare move. There was that gun in his back. Judah Glayden hit him again, and Dick Snowden kept on smiling. He didn't even bother to wipe off the drop of blood that trickled down from the corner of his mouth.

"What have you found out?" Judah growled.

Kathleen couldn't bear the sight of Dick Snowden standing there, taking Glayden's punishment without flinching.

"Don't," she said, "don't hit him again. I'll tell you; I'll tell you."

Dick Snowden, his voice brittle, said:

"Don't tell anything, Miss Croydon."

Judah's fist crashed into Dick's face almost before the words were out. Dick Snowden reeled a little, and with the next blow he went down. Judah drew back his foot, but Kathleen stopped him.

"Don't, Mr. Glayden, don't! I'll tell you."

Her words came piteously fast. "The first line means 'in'; the third line 'of.'" She hastened to explain how Dick Snowden had arrived at that solution.

Dick Snowden, glaring up with hate from the floor at Judah, said bitterly:

"What'd you tell the fat slob for? If he ever gets the whole thing out

of you, there's no telling what he'll do to you."

Kathleen looked miserable. She watched Dick Snowden's cheek swelling, the drops of blood oozing slowly from his lips. Suddenly she dropped down beside him and took a flimsy little handkerchief from her purse. She dabbed at the blood-flecked lips.

"You're hurt," she said.

Dick Snowden gazed up at her, an odd look in his eyes, then he grinned crookedly.

"Hell," he said, "he couldn't hurt me in a thousand years." He struggled to his feet and helped Kathleen up. He gave Judah a glance, then shifted his gaze to Dick. The butler was standing there like a figure of stone, the gun in his hand, ready.

"We'll take him upstairs," Judah said, "where he'll be safe. In the meantime, Miss Croydon, you might concentrate on your work. There are still a couple of lines in that message, that need elucidation. Come on," he said to Dick Snowden roughly, "let's get going."

CHAPTER V.

"HE'S DEAD."

FOR a time, Kathleen remained in the library alone. She was terribly frightened, and oddly enough more for Dick Snowden than for herself. Where had Judah and Dick taken him? What were they going to do to him? She tried to get her mind off of that by concentrating on the meaning of the two unsolved lines of the message on which Dick Snowden had made such an auspicious start, without making any headway. Around one o'clock she went upstairs to her room. For some inexplicable reason she felt safer there. Some ten

minutes later, Matilda Glayden came in.

"How much," Matilda asked, "has Judah promised you if you find the money? Whatever it is," Matilda said, her voice indescribably harsh, "I'll give you twice as much. You can't trust him, but you can trust me."

In a vague voice Kathleen, scarcely realizing what she said, protested, "He's your husband!"

"Yes, he's my husband," the woman retorted, "and he hates me; hates me on account of Claude; hates me the way my father hated me on account of Claude—as if it were my fault. And Judah beats him; he beats Claude for no reason at all, as if it were Claude's fault any more than mine."

"Who is Claude?" Kathleen asked.

The woman looked about her furtively. "I wouldn't tell you, only you heard last night. I know you heard. Don't lie to me! Claude is my son."

"Where is he? Why do you keep him locked up?"

Matilda looked momentarily dis-trait, then a cunning expression flared up in her eyes.

"He's not here," she said. "We don't keep him locked up; nobody keeps him locked up." She wandered about the room in aimless circles, wringing her thin hands. Then she recovered herself. "I'll give you twice as much as Judah," she said; "three times as much. I'll have Disk bring up your lunch. It will be pleasanter for you to eat up here by yourself. But look out for Disk. Disk's a beast." And then she wandered out without another word.

Disk appeared later with a tray, but apparently Matilda's warning had been needless. He put the tray down without speaking and went out.

Kathleen ate some of the food and drank two cups of tea. She felt better after that, had a notion she might be able to cope with whatever turned up next. She went to the window and looked out. Between her and the chauffeur's house, she saw an old well. It meant nothing to her for the moment. Her mind reverted to the puzzle of the second and fourth lines; particularly the second. She couldn't get it out of her mind.

The sailor's friend and one in every port.

She kept thinking of it, her eyes on the well, then suddenly her hand went to her lips smothering an exclamation. Of course that was it! She had the answer. It was right there before her eyes. Incredibly simple now. Her mind went back to the dead Abner Sneed. He had made the puzzle just hard enough, but not too hard. He had probably wanted somebody in this strange house to solve it; might even have hoped that they would solve it more or less simultaneously and then fight for the money.

Suddenly Kathleen felt very tired. She had had only a few hours sleep on the previous night, and now she went from the window to the bed and lay down, trying to solve the problem that confronted her. Before she knew it she had fallen asleep.

She awoke many hours later. The room was pitch-dark. She rose and groped for the switch. Eventually, she found it. Her hair was in disarray and she tried to straighten it out. She looked at her wrist watch and found that it was almost ten o'clock. For a moment she stood listening, struck by the fact that the house was once more enveloped in that unearthly stillness of the night

before. She tried to tell herself that meant nothing; that the people in this house retired early; that if she shot the bolts on the door she would be perfectly secure and safe.

Then it happened. A strange, muffled shuffling out in the hall. She could almost visualize what was going on. Somebody was staggering along outside. Somebody was clutching at the wall for support. For seconds the sound was drowned out by the pounding of her own heart, and for more seconds she tried to think of what to do. Eventually, she made for the door. Her hands were on the bolts, and she started to push them forward to lock herself in, but she found she couldn't do it. There was something out there, something terrible that she had to know. She just couldn't stay there cooped up in her room, waiting—waiting. Slowly, she opened the door and peered out. She saw Matilda Glayden standing with her back against the wall, her hands spread out. Swiftly, Kathleen stepped out.

"What's the matter, Mrs. Glayden?"

"He's dead," Matilda said, "he's dead."

Kathleen took her by the shoulders and shook her.

"Who's dead?" she demanded.

Matilda turned bleak eyes on her.

"Why, Judah," she said, as though Kathleen had asked a silly question. "Judah's dead."

Kathleen couldn't stand any more. She rushed down the hall to Doctor Lombardy's room. She pounded frantically at the door, and when Doctor Lombardy, in a purple dressing gown came out, Kathleen tried to explain in incoherent words what had happened. He listened to her, his eyes dark and brooding, then stepped across the hall, opened the

Glaydens's door and looked in. The light was on.

Judah Glayden lay on his bed, a scalpel thrust deep into his heart.

Kathleen found herself standing there, her nails digging into the palms of her hands. She could think of only one thing. With Glayden dead, Silas Sneed, crippled though he was, could help her get out of this house of horror. She stepped swiftly across the hall, knocked twice on Silas Sneed's door, opened it, and stepped inside.

CHAPTER VI.

CLAUDE.

SILAS was awake. He turned his wasted face toward her, a look of inquiry in his eyes. She shut the door behind her, and said in breathless haste:

"Your brother-in-law, Mr. Glayden, is dead. He's been stabbed."

Silas said nothing. Not a muscle in his face moved.

"I want to go away from here," Kathleen said. "I tried to go this morning, but Judah wouldn't let me. I'm locked in." It required a terrific effort for her to keep hysteria out of her voice. "There's a man here who works for you—a man named Snowden, and Glayden and the butler have locked him up somewhere in this house. Where are they keeping him prisoner? He helped me solve the puzzle of your father's will."

Silas Sneed raised himself on his elbows. A fierce light came into his eyes.

"You—you solved it?"

"Yes," she said, "yes. I'll tell you the answer, but you must tell me where Mr. Snowden is. You've got to fix it so we can get out of here. I'm afraid of Disk. I'm afraid of

everything in this house, except perhaps you."

"Of course you needn't be afraid of me," Silas Sneed said. His eyes grew veiled. "I wanted you to go away in the first place, but I'm glad now you didn't. I knew you had solved the first and third lines. Lombardy overheard Disk and Glayden talking. I thought perhaps that by now you might have guessed at the rest, that you might have told Glayden. Glayden was a man not to be trusted. What is the answer?"

"Tell me where Dick Snowden is," she insisted. "Promise you will arrange it so that we can leave."

"Of course you may leave," Silas Sneed said. "As for your friend, Mr. Snowden, I'm fairly certain that you will find him up on the next floor. You will see three doors up there, doors to just ordinary rooms. The hall is paneled. The third panel to the left of the first door is a door, too. Nobody would ever know it; nobody would ever suspect that behind that panel there is another very small room, not an ordinary room at all. My father had it built years ago when it became obvious that Claude would never be cured, that Claude would always be a menace."

"How do you get in?"

"In the lower right-hand corner of the panel there is a tiny hole. If you search under the carpet in front of the panel you will discover a nail. Insert that into the hole and press down. It operates a little electric switch that opens the door. You needn't be afraid of Claude. He won't hurt you. There are some people he would hurt, but not you. If I'm not mistaken, you will find your friend there. It's the only place in the house where he could be safely hidden. And now tell me the secret of my father's will."

Kathleen started to speak, but he stopped her.

"Bend down and whisper in my ear. You can never tell in this house but some one is listening."

Kathleen humored him. She bent over the bed, and in a scarcely audible tone told him what she had discovered. She straightened up and found Silas Sneed looking past her strangely. Instinctively, she realized why. Some one was standing behind her. She swung around and discovered Doctor Lombardy there. She started to pass him, but he stopped her, closed the door, and stood with his back to her.

"Judah's dead," Lombardy said to Silas.

"Another suicide," said Silas in a flat, calm tone.

Doctor Lombardy shook his head morosely. "We'll have to notify the police."

"Yes, of course," Silas Sneed agreed.

"Let me out," Kathleen said, "I'm leaving."

Doctor Lombardy paid no attention to her.

"What about her?" he asked of Silas. "She knows too much. When that precious brother-in-law of yours and the butler discovered that she had partly solved the will they lost their heads. We can't let the police talk to her, and we can't let her go until she's finished her job. She can do it, too."

"I have done it," Kathleen burst out. "I just told Mr. Sneed the secret of it."

"So," Lombardy said slowly, "so she's told you! You didn't have in mind to double cross me, Sneed, did you?"

"No, Lombardy, of course not," Sneed said, scowling. "She only told me this minute."

"Perhaps," he said in a tone full of meaning, "it will be possible for me to convince the police that this is another suicide. We ought to be able to do something with that district attorney, Heinemann, especially now that we have some real money. What'll we do with this girl?"

"Nothing," Silas said gently. "We will, in due course, reward her for what she's accomplished. She's free to go, taking Mr. Snowden—who it seems has been locked up by Judah and Disk—with her. I've told her where she can find him." Silas lifted his eyes toward the ceiling.

"I see," said Doctor Lombardy, "I see." He stepped away from the door and turned to Kathleen, "You'd better hurry while Disk is still downstairs. We might have trouble with Disk."

He held the door for her, and Kathleen hurried out.

She went swiftly down the hall and mounted to the floor above. The three doors that Silas had mentioned were before her. She counted the panels, knelt down in front of the third one to the left of the first door, groped along the edge of a faded carpet and discovered the nail. She had little trouble in locating the tiny hole in the lower right corner

of the panel. Her pulses throbbing, she listened intently but heard nothing. Then she inserted the nail and pressed down hard. The panel slipped to one side smoothly.

She rose and looked into a small, poorly-lighted room. There was a bed in the middle of it. Almost instantly, she made out the figure of Dick Snowden bound hand and foot lying there; then she made out something else; something that froze the blood in her veins, yet led her to spring quickly into the room. A tiny figure was sitting on the edge of the bed. It was a man, yet not a man, but a misshapen dwarf, with a short, broad torso, long arms and the spindliest of legs. In a vague way he suggested Matilda, and Silas Sneed, too, what with his long, matted hair and sharp features. He sat there looking down at Dick Snowden, a weird, gloating expression on his face. His right hand was upraised, holding a little knife—a surgeon's scalpel. He was giggling softly. Kathleen screamed. The dwarf turned his head. For seconds he stared at Kathleen. Then he got off the bed and waddled toward her, a puzzled look in his eyes.

"How do you do?" he said in an unbelievably squeaky voice.

Kathleen, her eyes riveted on that



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gleaming thin knife, turned instinctively to the door, just in time to see it slide shut.

CHAPTER VII.

THE PANEL SLIDES BACK.

KATHLEEN, her back against the wall, was staring wide-eyed at Claude. He seemed to take her in with a sort of childlike curiosity.

"Who are you?" he asked. "You're not grandfather's wife. She died a long time ago. She was kinder to me than my mother. 'You don't think I'm mad, do you?' he asked in an anxious tone. 'Everybody thinks I'm mad except Uncle Silas. He understands me and he doesn't mind my being small and deformed. You see, I understand everything. I know that I'm a cripple, so I can't be mad, can I?'"

"No, of course not," Kathleen said hastily. She wondered what she would do if he sprang at her with that knife; wondered if physically she would be a match for him, and had her doubts, despite her advantage in height.

"I'm very strong," he said, almost as if in answer to her thoughts, "and I know how to handle a knife. I never miss. Sometimes I get a chance to go about the house. I like that. This room is so small. I had a chance a few days ago, or maybe it was weeks. It's hard for me to tell the time in this room. You see, it has no windows. I can't tell night from day. But Judah caught me and beat me. I suppose if I were really mad I wouldn't mind being beaten, and if I were bigger I wouldn't need a knife like this. I could beat people back with sticks or my fists."

Kathleen said, "I don't like people being beaten."

"Do you like knives?" Claude

asked, tense interest in his voice. "I have quite a few knives like this. My uncle Silas gave them to me. These are very fine knives, very sharp; they go in so easily. Shall I show you where the others are hidden? My uncle Judah, the other night after he beat me, searched the room, but he couldn't find them."

Kathleen, her throat so constricted that she could scarcely speak, managed to say, "No."

She glanced at the bed where Dick Snowden lay. She could see that he was trying to free himself quietly from his bonds. With his eyes he was encouraging her to keep talking to this monstrous little madman. Her glance traveled about the tiny windowless room, and for the first time she noticed that it was padded along the entire walls right up to some small vents along the ceiling, which evidently furnished what air there was. She noticed that the floor was thickly carpeted. Everything had been done to make the room soundproof. There was a single light set flush with the ceiling.

"How do you manage to get out when you want to?" she asked, to make conversation.

"I can't get out when I want to," he said. "Somebody has to let me out. It's a secret. I had to promise not to tell. You see that man?" he said over his shoulder. "They pushed him in here—I think it was yesterday—and I helped him onto the bed. At first I thought of cutting the ropes, because I'm really very kind, but then I thought that perhaps he was an enemy of my uncle Silas, so I helped him onto the bed. You see, I'm not very tall, and the bed is just the right height." He made a downward, jabbing motion with his knife, and Kathleen had all she could do to keep from screaming.

"He's not an enemy of your uncle Silas's," she said desperately. "He's a friend; a very good friend of his."

"Oh," Claude said, "then I must set him free." He made for the bed, his spindly legs giving him a funny rolling motion.

Kathleen saw him put the blade of his knife to the ropes that held Dick Snowden's wrists, but before he'd severed a single strand, he changed his mind. He turned and regarded her suspiciously.

"Perhaps you're not telling me the truth," he said shrilly. "It may be only a trick. You think you can fool Claude, but Claude is not easily fooled."

"I am telling you the truth," said Kathleen steadily, "and I'm a friend of your uncle Silas's, too. Has he ever told you about the money hidden on this place by your grandfather? I've come to help him find it. He probably wants the money so that he can take you away to travel."

The dwarfed madman came away from the bed and confronted her, his sharp features alive with interest.

"Money on this place? Tell me about that!"

Kathleen told him at great length, spinning it out as long as she could, hoping against hope that either Dick Snowden would be able to free himself or that help in some form would arrive. When she had finished, and it was plain that Claude, his interest satisfied, had some notion of going back to the bed, Dick Snowden called:

"Tell him about the places his uncle is going to take him."

Kathleen began to talk about Italy. She had never been there, but she had read a great deal and drew, for the rest, on her imagination. Claude listened enthralled. And when she had finished with Italy, she went to

France, to England, to Norway, and ultimately to the Orient. Hours and hours went by. It seemed to her that if she had to keep this up much longer she would go mad. She felt like *Scheherezade* in the "Arabian Nights," spinning one tale after another, trying to stave off an inevitable fate. She looked at her wrist watch. It was after five! Five in the morning! She could scarcely believe that she had been on her feet all these hours, talking to the dwarfed madman, yet she had.

Suddenly she heard a faint sound behind her, wheeled about and saw the panel sliding back a foot or so. She heard a low whistle. Claude made for the opening. She was there ahead of him and tried to squeeze through. A hand from without struck her savagely in the face, sending her reeling back. Again that low whistle and before she could regain her balance, Claude, like some fantastic little animal, had scuffled past her through the opening, and the panel slid shut.

CHAPTER VIII.

A CAN OF VARNISH.

SUMMONED by Doctor Lombardy, Captain Toll had arrived shortly after midnight, and District Attorney Heinemann had come with him.

Stalking up and down the library Captain Toll stormed: "This is a hell of a case and a hell of a house. It looks as though a wrecking crew had been through it."

"Probably something wrong with the plumbing," District Attorney Heinemann said.

"I suppose this is another suicide," "Beak" Toll growled.

"It looks very much like it to me," said Heinemann. "You see, these people here are a little queer,

I'm perfectly willing to admit that. To me it looks as though Doctor Lombardy was right. Glayden had been brooding over something for months, and, when whatever it was that worried him got too much for him, he decided to do away with himself. He committed suicide the same way that his brother-in-law, Minton Sneed, had done. Mental suggestion, you know. The sort of thing that happens every day."

Toll stopped his pacing and glared at the district attorney. The brazen effrontery of the man left him speechless.

"Glayden died in the same room that Minton did," he declared finally. "When Minton died that room was bolted top and bottom and that, I admit, made it look like suicide in a way. Glayden's wife, Matilda, who slept in the bed next to Judah's, now says that when her husband died, the door was bolted, too, and I believe she's telling the truth. But she's lying when she says she, too, thinks her husband committed suicide. She knows better. I don't think she did it herself, but I think she knows who did it and knows how that person got in and out of the room. The funny thing is that I've got a notion there's somebody else in this house besides the people I've talked to, and yet I can't find them. Me and my men have been through every room."

"A ghost, maybe," Heinemann suggested sarcastically.

Beak Toll grunted.

"The butler, Lombardy, Matilda, and the crippled Silas Sneed; they're all there are in this house. None of 'em have anything to say, but every one of them is worried. I wonder why," he muttered. He paused and looked with disfavor at the district attorney. He knew perfectly well why Heinemann had

come along at this late hour. Heinemann was troubled about this second death, feared that something might be discovered that would show he had been wrong in the case of Minton Sneed.

"Why don't you go on home," Beak Toll growled, "and let me handle this in my own way?"

Heinemann's face took on a more pinched look, then he said, "All right," and strode out.

Beak Toll watched him go then he ambled about the house. He wandered into Silas Sneed's room. It was in darkness, and Silas Sneed appeared to be asleep, so Beak Toll tiptoed out. He found Doctor Lombardy across the hall, seated in an armchair beneath a reading lamp, smoking a long, thin cigarette.

"I've sent my men back to headquarters, and I'm planning to spend the rest of the night here."

Doctor Lombardy, blowing clouds of smoke to the ceiling, shrugged.

"Mrs. Glayden doesn't seem to be any too upset over her husband's death," Beak Toll ventured.

"Perhaps she didn't like him," said Doctor Lombardy coolly.

Beak Toll went out and found Matilda. She said he could have a room, and led the way to the same room that Kathleen had occupied two nights before. She asked him to wait in the hall while she went inside to see if the room was in order. She was back again in a few minutes and told him he could go in. Beak Toll thanked her, and sank down in the creaking rocker. For a time he swayed to and fro, then he straightened up and sniffed. There was just the faintest trace of perfume in the air. He got up and walked to the dressing table. There were traces of powder below the mirror. Some woman had occupied the room recently, and it wasn't Matilda. Ma-

tilda wasn't given to perfume and powder. Beak Toll hastily pulled open the bureau drawers and found them empty. He opened the closet door. This, too, was empty except that far in the back he found a small traveling bag. He opened it. It was packed. The lacy things, the smart pajamas, couldn't have belonged to Matilda, either.

A bag packed for traveling! It required some explanation.

Beak Toll made his way down to the library. He found Disk there. Disk was rummaging through the books. He had a notion that Kathleen had partially discovered the secret of Abner Sneed's will in one of the books. Beak Toll growled:

"What are you doing here?"

"Nothing, sir. Just straightening things up a little."

"Well, go on to bed," Captain Toll said.

"Yes, sir." Then he hesitated. "If you're staying the night, captain, you might—you might sort of keep an eye on Doctor Lombardy."

Toll eyed him for a long time.

"Why?" he demanded eventually. "What's the matter with you? You look scared to death."

"I am a little frightened. The knife with which Mr. Glayden was killed was a surgeon's knife. Mr. Minton Sneed was supposed to have committed suicide with the same kind of a knife. Those knives belonged to Doctor Lombardy."

"He admits it," said Beak Toll. "He says somebody stole them from him."

"Doctor Lombardy keeps his instrument case in his room, sir, and he keeps his room locked."

"Go on to bed," Beak Toll snapped.

Alone, Toll looked about the library. Disk had lied when he said that he was straightening things up; Toll was sure of that. What had he

been looking for? After fifteen minutes search, Toll hadn't come on anything. He did discover an open can of varnish which Dick Snowden had used to touch up his handiwork whenever he had replaced a bookcase. Toll sniffed at the can. He started out; then he had an inspiration and came back. He picked up the can of varnish and the brush. Looking furtively up and down the hall, and finding it deserted, he sneaked up to his room unobserved.

Scarcely had the door closed behind Beak Toll, when Doctor Lombardy crossed the hall into Silas Sneed's room. He switched on the lights. Silas Sneed seemed to be sleeping, but that didn't trouble Doctor Lombardy. He shook him roughly by the shoulder and Silas Sneed opened his eyes.

"What did the girl find out? What did she tell you about the will? Where's the stuff hidden?" Lombardy demanded.

"That doesn't concern you," Silas Sneed said. "I made an agreement with you and I'll keep it. You'll be paid."

"I happen to think that it does concern me," said Lombardy.

Sneed turned his head away so that Lombardy couldn't see the hatred in his face.

"That policeman, Captain Toll, is staying in the house to-night. Maybe I better go and have a chat with him. He might like to know what I know," Doctor Lombardy continued ominously.

"I'll tell you to-morrow, Lombardy. I'll have to think out a way to protect myself first," Silas said.

"Protect yourself from what?"

"From you," said the man in the bed. "You see, you might not be satisfied with the share we agreed upon in the beginning. You might take it into your head to blackmail

me. You might even go so far as to want all of it, or at least most of it."

"Don't be a fool, Sneed," Lombardy said. "If you want to think it over until to-morrow, it's all right with me."

"Matilda was in here a few minutes ago," Silas said slowly. "She doesn't like the idea of sleeping in the room where her husband was killed."

Lombardy's eyes narrowed.

"Why not? The police have taken Judah's body away."

"It is the only room available in the house," Silas Sneed went on, "now that Toll is staying here. The others are all torn up." His voice was amazingly steady. His eyes were vacant. "I was wondering if you would mind changing with her for the night?"

Doctor Lombardy jerked his body upright, his eyes narrowed. He looked thoughtfully into space.

"I think that would be all right," he agreed slowly. He reached into his hip pocket and brought out a short, flat automatic. He examined the safety catch with some ostentation. After that he slipped the gun back into his pocket. "I'm a very light sleeper," he announced, "and I haven't forgotten that not only did Judah die in that room, but Minton Sneed died there, too."

He went out and found Matilda standing in front of his door. Her face was leaden, her eyes inquiring.

"You can have my room," Lombardy said, eying her curiously.

CHAPTER IX.

BEAK TOLL'S SCHEME.

BEAK TOLL waited three quarters of an hour. Then he peered out of his room. He judged that by now every one had retired and was asleep. He picked up the can of varnish and

the brush. Walking noiselessly, he stepped out into the hall. The first door he came to was Silas Sneed's. Beak Toll bent down, dipped the brush in the can and sloshed varnish in front of the door. He went on to the next. He painted the floor in front of all the doors, even though he knew that the rooms behind weren't occupied, their interiors were literally gutted. Up the stairs, he walked on tiptoe to where he knew Disk's room was. He painted the floor here, too, and the floor in front of the other two doors. His task completed, he made his way back silently to his room.

If anybody moved in that house this night, they'd leave a trail of varnish he couldn't miss. If there was some one hidden in that house who went into one of those rooms and out again, he, Beak Toll, would know it in the morning.

With the door to his room slightly ajar, he sat down in an armchair, listening intently, but before he knew it he had fallen asleep.

A short time later he awoke with a start. He could almost swear that he had heard the sound of running feet. Shaking his head to clear his brain, he stepped out and listened. Down the hall he thought he heard some one moaning. He moved forward quickly. The moaning sound came from the Glaydens's room. Beak came to an abrupt stop in front of the door, his mouth open, his long chin hanging down. The door was open, or rather the lower left-hand panel was open. So that's how people got in and out of that room, even though it was bolted! That panel constituted a miniature door, not detectable when closed. Yet when Beak Toll got onto his hands and knees and tried to crawl through, he found the opening not nearly large enough. It wouldn't even have

been big enough for a smaller man. Captain Toll swore and looked nonplused. He stuck his head through and looked around. The room was in darkness, and he couldn't make out anything.

"Mrs. Glayden," he called, "are you hurt? Can you open the door?"

Only that same soft moan answered him.

Toll reached in with his long arm. His hand came in contact with the lower bolt. He pulled it back. He rose quickly, then threw himself against the door. It took three assaults before it gave, and he went spinning into the room. He groped about, found the switch, and flooded the room with light. But it wasn't Matilda he saw sitting in a chair. It was Doctor Lombardy. Lombardy's gun lay at his feet. He was holding one hand to his chest. Blood was trickling between his fingers. In his other hand he held a scalpel, the blade stained red.

"What happened?" Beak Toll said.

"I'm all right," Lombardy gasped.

Toll heard a gasping sound behind him and spun around. Matilda stood there clothed in a faded wrapper, taking in the scene with bleak eyes.

"Phone for a doctor," Toll snapped. "Quick!"

Matilda, walking like one in a trance, wandered off, and Toll turned back to the wounded man.

"Who did it? Do you know?"

"Claude," said Doctor Lombardy.

"Who's Claude?"

"Never mind. There's not time. Besides it was really Silas."

"Let me help you onto the bed," Toll said.

Doctor Lombardy shook his head. "I'm all right," he said stubbornly. "There's something I want to do."

Beak Toll was in a quandary. If

Lombardy wouldn't let him do any thing for him, he couldn't use force, might get away. He dashed out of and in the meantime the murderer the room. Of course it was nonsense for Lombardy to say that Silas had stabbed him; still he better make sure. He yanked open Silas Sneed's door. The man was there in bed, his eyes shut, breathing lightly. Beak Toll got down on all fours and sniffed the carpet in front of Silas's room. The odor of varnish on the carpet was unmistakable, and the trail led directly from Silas Sneed's room to the room in which Lombardy had been stabbed. Strangely enough, it didn't stop there, but went on. Beak Toll, a grotesque figure, crawling on his hands and knees, his long nose almost rubbing the carpet, followed it to the stairs. Here the trail divided. Beak could sniff it on the first few steps going up and the first few steps going down. He was utterly bewildered. Whoever had stepped in that varnish couldn't have gone both ways. Of course, he might first have gone up and then down, or *vice versa*. Beak decided to follow the scent down as the most logical course. His quarry unquestionably, in trying to escape, would go down. Beak was right about that. The smell of varnish persisted right to the front door. But the stone steps outside hadn't taken the varnish, or else by the time the killer had gotten there the stuff had rubbed off.

Beak Toll beat the hedges, looked up into trees, searched behind the well, and eventually reached the chauffeur's house. The door was open, and he went through every room and discovered nothing. Discouraged, he started back toward the house.

While Captain Toll was busy searching the grounds, Doctor Lom-

bardy, with a superhuman effort set about to do the thing he wanted to do. He pressed his left hand hard over his wound, bent down and picked up his gun, with his right. There was a fixed look in his eyes as he staggered out across the hall, each step incredibly painful. With his bloody hand he took hold of the knob on Silas's door. Lombardy turned it gently and swung the door back. The room was in darkness, but he knew where the bed was. Within a foot or so, he raised his gun.

"Sneed," Doctor Lombardy said softly, "Sneed, it's me—Lombardy! I'm here standing over you. You're going to die with a body full of slugs. Even so, it won't be as bad as a knife in your lungs."

He got no further. Something landed hard on the back of his head; something that sent him reeling crazily until he crashed to the floor.

Silas Sneed, hidden behind the door stepped out and put down the heavy brass candlestick with a low chuckle. Stripping off the long, old-fashioned nightgown he was wearing and disclosed himself fully dressed underneath. He stepped out in the hall, listened, and heard Matilda telephoning downstairs. Matilda would certainly scream or perhaps faint if she saw him come walking toward her; Matilda, who for years had only thought of him as a bedridden paralytic. She might rouse Disk, and there was a policeman in the house, too. And yet he must hide somewhere; hide and bide his time.

Gingerly, Silas made his way downstairs, stopping every now and then to look over the banister for a sign of Matilda or Disk. And then somewhere in that house there was Claude. For months and months Silas had thought over this whole

business, and it had never been part of his plan that Claude should be roaming about the house at a moment like this. Claude ought to be back in that little room, but Silas hadn't dared run the risk of putting him there, with that policeman in the house ready to pop out at any minute. So Claude had to be left to his own devices. Anyway he doubted whether he would have done more to Claude than just leave him in the little room. He probably wouldn't have done away with Claude the way he had planned. That really had been Lombardy's idea. A very ingenious man, Lombardy. Too bad that he wasn't the sort that could be trusted.

Silas got to the foot of the stairs. Without a sound, he opened the door to the cellar and went down into the darkness.

CHAPTER X.

SOLID STEEL!

THE instant that Claude slipped out of the little room and the panel slid shut, Kathleen went to Dick Snowden. She struggled with the knots that fettered Dick Snowden's hands, but finally managed to get them loose at the expense of a few broken finger nails. Dick Snowden's wrists were raw, bleeding, as a result of his own efforts to liberate himself.

"Your poor wrists," she said.

He gave her a quick glance and grinned. "It's nothing."

He was busy with the cords about his ankles. Eventually he was able to get up. He stretched himself, flexed his arms and knees, trying to take the stiffness out of them.

"This Claude is a nice little fellow. He loves knives. What brought you here?"

Kathleen explained.

"So you thought you wouldn't leave this fire trap without seeing that I got out of here, too? What made you do that?" Dick Snowden asked curiously.

Kathleen looked momentarily confused.

"It seemed the thing to do," she said. "I wonder who let Claude out. Was it Matilda, Disk, or perhaps Doctor Lombardy? And why did some one let him out?"

Dick Snowden looked solemn.

"The question is who is going to let us out?"

Kathleen started. "Suppose nobody ever does? Suppose they never come back? We'd—we'd starve, Dick."

He came over to her, took hold of her shoulders and looked soberly into her face.

"I've never worried much about dying before," he declared. "I was always sort of fatalistic about it, but now—now, just when I've found you —" He dropped his hands and turned away. Then his voice took on a lighter note. "I guess we'll get out of this somehow."

Even as he spoke, he was on his knees at the panel, tearing away the padding. He had cleared away a foot or so when he stopped, a look of bitter disappointment on his face. "Steel," he said, "it's solid steel."

"Never mind," Kathleen said, "they're bound to bring Claude back here. We'll be ready for them, and we won't let the panel slide shut this time."

"I'm not so sure," Dick Snowden said. "I've a feeling I ought to do something to get us out of here."

He stepped back from the panel six feet, then threw his weight against it. The panel didn't even quiver. Then he faced about sud-

denly and sniffed. A drawn look came into his face.

"Do you smell something?"

Kathleen paled.

"Yes," she said, "yes. I think—I think it's gas."

They stared with frightened faces toward the ceiling where the little air vents were.

"Listen," said Dick.

Faintly, ever so faintly, they could make out a soft, hissing sound: the whisper of the gas coming into the room. He let go of her and stepped up onto the bar of the bed, but even from there he couldn't reach the ceiling. The head of the bed was made of rounded brass and he couldn't climb that. He stepped down and went to where Kathleen stood; his face was dead-white.

"I guess it won't be long now," he said.

Kathleen was already beginning to feel dizzy. In a vague, confused way she had a notion that there was something she wanted to do, something she wanted to do very much. She swayed a little toward him, and when he caught her in his arms, she remembered what it was, and pressed her lips against his. Dick Snowden picked her up and placed her gently on the mattress. They couldn't die now; they *couldn't*. He wouldn't let it happen. He took out his handkerchief, tied it across his nose and mouth and feverishly went to work on a bolt that he had already loosened in a bar on the bed. He had it out before it was necessary to take a single breath. He yanked the bar loose and, using it like a battering-ram, banged savagely at the panel. He didn't remember how often he struck—perhaps a dozen times—before the bar slipped from his nerveless fingers. He tried desperately to pick it up, but reeled and sank to his knees.

CHAPTER XI.

THE WELL.

BEAK TOLL went back to the house. He passed Matilda in the hall.

"They're sending an ambulance," she said dully.

Beak Toll said nothing, but went upstairs three at a time to the third floor, stopping near the top to sniff the stair carpet. No doubt about it. It smelled of varnish. He crawled along the floor feeling like an idiot, but grimly determined. The trail of varnish led past the first door and ended abruptly at a panel. Beak Toll looked baffled. Why in the world should anybody walk smack up to a panel—a blank wall, so to speak—and go no farther? He got up and brushed off his knees.

Just then he heard the door to Disk's room open. The butler stood there. He looked frightened, and there was a huge gun in his hand.

Toll walked up to him and took the gun away. He shoved the butler in front of him to the panel.

"What's behind that?" Beak Toll demanded.

Disk avoided his gaze.

"Nothing, sir."

Beak Toll clipped him on the chin with his fist sending Disk's head back against the wall.

"What's back of that panel?"

"Nothing——" Disk began.

Faint sounds of banging came from behind the panel. Not even its soundproof qualities could entirely deaden the crashing blows of that iron bar that Dick Snowden was wielding within.

Captain Toll knocked Disk down to make sure of getting an answer to his next question.

"How does it open?" he roared.

Disk got on one knee, looked up in terror at the captain. He had

helped lock Dick Snowden into that room. He wondered what would happen to him once that young man got out, although he had no idea that Kathleen was inside, too. And as for Claude—well, he might be in there, and then again he might not. Claude had been known to get out.

The pounding behind the panel suddenly ceased, and Disk thought for a moment of brazening it out, but the look on the captain's face caused Disk to change his mind. He fumbled hastily under the carpet, found the nail and inserted it in the tiny hole in the panel.

"You press down on this and it slides back," he said sullenly. "It stays open as long as you keep your finger on the nail."

"Push," said Beak Toll.

The butler pressed down on the head of the nail. The panel slid back.

Beak Toll stuck his head in, then ducked back as the overwhelming odor of gas struck him in the face. Still he had seen enough. He had seen two bodies lying on the floor. He didn't dare go in to get them for fear that Disk would lock him in. He jerked the butler to one side by the collar and stooped down himself to press the nail down.

"Get in there," he said. "There are two people on the floor. Drag them out and be quick about it. The room is full of gas."

Disk, holding his breath, went inside. He brought Kathleen out first, then Dick Snowden. Toll let go of the nail. The panel closed.

"What in hell is this," Beak bel-lowed, waving his fists

He bent down over the two inert figures and ascertained that there was still life in them. Just then the wail of the ambulance siren came to his ears. He ordered Disk to go down and bring the doctor up to the

third floor; told him to tell the doctor to bring his pulmotor with him. Toll tried to open the window. It was stuck, and he kicked out the panes with the heel of his boot. The doctor appeared in a minute.

"See what you can do with them," ordered Toll. "When you're through, come down to the floor below. There's a guy that's been stabbed down there. I should have sent for a dozen ambulances."

He clumped hastily downstairs and went into the room where he had left Lombardy. The latter wasn't there. He looked in the room that Matilda had used. It was empty. He went to Silas Sneed's room, and there he found Lombardy lying face down in the far corner. There was an ugly gash at the back of Lombardy's head. Lombardy's right arm was stretched out and his hand was in a hole in the floor where a little trapdoor had been opened. Lombardy's hand was tightly clutched about the wheel of a valve concealed in the floor.

Beak Toll pried the hand loose and turned Lombardy over. The captain knelt down and placed his ear close to Lombardy's mouth.

"Never—never mind—Claude," Lombardy whispered. "I got him. You get Silas—Silas murdered——"

Lombardy was dead.

Toll turned to the bed. He had forgotten in the excitement all about Silas Sneed, and when he found the bed empty and Silas Sneed gone, Toll sank limply into a chair.

Beak Toll had the ominous premonition that he would stumble on Silas in some obscure corner and that he would be dead. A nice story for the papers; two murders in the house while Captain Toll was there: maybe four, if those two upstairs were not brought around. Wearily, Beak Toll got to his feet.

He spent the next ten minutes going through every room and every closet in the house. He even went through the cellar, but found no one there. He wound up on the third floor just as the doctor, with the aid of Disk, was about to help Kathleen and Dick Snowden downstairs.

"When can I talk to them?" Beak Toll asked.

"Haven't you any feeling?" the doctor said. He glanced at the girl whose limp body he was holding upright. Her face was still bluish.

Beak Toll said, "No. When can I talk to them?"

"In about an hour," the doctor snapped.

Beak Toll told the doctor to take his patients to the room with the broken-down door. There were two beds in there. He watched them going down with gloomy eyes. He went through Disk's room after that, and through the two other rooms that were empty. Then he went to the library, telephoned the police station, told the man at the desk to send up all the men he could round up at this ungodly hour.

He found Matilda crouched by the stove in the kitchen rocking to and fro. He asked her to make him some coffee, then he went back into the library. There was nothing to do but wait for his men to come. He couldn't, single-handed, surround the house.

He sat down for a minute, then sprang up as though a bee had stung him, and dashed upstairs. Some one had tried to kill those two people in that concealed room. The murderer might still be in the house. Perhaps there were other panels in this damn place behind which people could hide. Those two youngsters who had been gassed were still in danger, if that were so. What an idiot he was to leave them alone.

He heaved a sigh of relief when he found them unharmed in the Glaydens's room.

Kathleen was on the bed nearest the window. She looked with frightened eyes at Captain Toll.

"It's all right," he assured her with gruff kindness. "I'm Captain Toll of the police. I don't suppose you want to talk?" he added.

She shook her head.

"You couldn't even just tell me if you know of some place in this house where a man could hide! Where Silas Sneed might be?"

He saw her eyes widen, saw the struggle in them as she tried to comprehend. But she said nothing; her head settled more deeply on the pillow, her eyes closed.

Beak Toll turned his back on her and stared morosely out of the window at the first signs of breaking dawn. He heard a murmur from the girl on the bed behind him, and turned. Her eyes were still closed. She was talking in her sleep. Beak Toll bent down and listened. "In windlass of well," he thought she was saying. It didn't make sense and he turned back to the window, looked toward the distant road beyond the coachman's house for a sign of the squad car with his men, so that he could get to work.

The doctor came in. "There is nothing I can do for that stiff in the room across the hall."

"Yeah, I know," said Toll, still looking out of the window. Then his whole body stiffened.

Outside, he saw a man creeping along the hedge, a shadowy form making his way slowly, carefully. Not fifty feet from where the man came to a stop, there was a well. A well! Was there some significance after all in what that girl had said in her sleep? "In windlass of well." Beak Toll dashed for the door. On

his way out he shouted to the doctor:

"Stay here and watch these two."

It took him only seconds to negotiate the stairs and get the front door open. He stepped out cautiously, inched his way along the house to the corner. Beak Toll waited. He wanted to see what was going to happen, and when he saw he could scarcely believe what was taking place.

The man had gone straight up to the well, but in a curious, furtive way. He was too far away to make out his features, but there was no doubt in Toll's mind that it was Silas Sneed. He saw Silas climb up on the wooden inclosure that surrounded the well. For the first time Toll noticed that Silas was carrying some tools, a hammer, and what looked like a chisel. What in the world was the man planning to do?

Beak Toll, taking advantage of the shadow of the hedge, even as Silas had done, crept forward. He had made about half the distance when he was stopped short by a weird cry that rang out with an eerie sound in the grey dawn.

"Uncle Silas! Uncle Silas!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE SECRET OF THE WILL.

FOR a moment Beak Toll thought that he was going mad. That cry seemed to come from the very depths of the well. He saw Silas on his precarious perch swaying, holding onto one of the uprights that supported the windlass. Then he saw him bend forward and look down.

Again that shrill cry, "Uncle Silas!"

Silas Sneed straightened up and began fumbling with the looped

strap that held the windlass crank in place. Beak Toll thought he understood what Silas was trying to do. There was some one suspended in the bucket that hung in the well. Silas was going to pull him up by winding more rope onto the windlass. Beak started forward, but he hadn't taken more than two steps when he wheeled at a sound.

Matilda, screaming, dashed past him. "You beast, you beast!" she cried. "You're going to drown him!"

Silas was still fumbling with the strap. He got the crank loose and, just as Matilda reached it, he let it go. The crank spun like mad as the rope unwound itself. A fearful shriek came from the well. Toll had never covered ground so fast before. Even so, he didn't get there in time to stop Silas from kicking Matilda in the face. Matilda had been clawing his legs trying to pull him down. She had been trying to get her hands on the crank. Matilda went down, but she was up again, screaming and clawing at Silas when Toll got there. He pulled her roughly to one side.

Silas looked down at him with wild eyes. He was drooling at the mouth. Toll, frantic at the thought that some one else might die, and largely because of his own slowness, yelled, "Get down off of there."

Silas lashed out at him with the hammer. It was a nasty blow that momentarily stunned Toll, but only for seconds. Then he reached for Silas, got him about the knees and pulled. But Silas wound his arms about the windlass support and held on with a madman's strength. But at last Beak Toll got him loose, and Silas let go so suddenly that they went down together with Silas on top. Toll had his hands full.

Silas still had his hammer and chisel. He let go of the hammer and jabbed at Toll with the chisel. The

captain caught his wrist, held it, and shouted to Matilda to pull up the bucket, while Silas pounded him in the face with his other hand.

When Toll heard the creaking of the windlass and knew that Matilda was busy, he gave a sudden heave, reached over with his free hand and wrested the chisel away from Silas and tossed it aside. Then he cracked Silas on the jaw. Silas lay still.

Beak Toll jumped to his feet and took the handle away from Matilda. He wound furiously until a head appeared above the inclosure of the well. Another foot or so and the bucket was clear, Toll threw the loop about the handle holding it fixed. He thought at first it was a child standing in that bucket and then, because of the mature face, he thought it wasn't. Behind him in a dead voice, he heard Matilda say, "Claude! You didn't drown!"

"No, mother," Claude said in his squeaky voice, "I didn't drown, but the bucket went down so fast, I lost my knife—the kitchen knife you gave me. It was a wonderful knife."

Beak Toll brought the bucket over the side of the railing onto the ground and lifted Claude out. He looked moodily down at the dwarfed little man. So this was Claude, and Matilda was his mother. No doubt he was small enough to have gone through that opening in the door where Judah Glayden had been murdered and later Lombardy had been stabbed. Beak Toll glanced at Matilda and then at the well.

"What was he doing in there?"

"I hid him there," she said defiantly. "I found him running down the hall and I knew you would search the house."

"And what was he trying to do?" Toll asked grimly, pointing to Silas Sneed still on the ground.

"I don't know," said Matilda. "I

was watching to see if any one went near the well. When I saw Silas go there I thought he had seen me hide Claude there. I thought he was going to drown him." She stopped in wonder. "I never knew Silas could walk."

Beak Toll heard the harsh clanging of the squad car bell. He stopped the car before it got to the house. Four of his men tumbled out.

Silas was now sitting up rubbing his jaw, a crafty look in his eyes.

"Take them to the station," Beak Toll said.

One of the detectives, Sergeant Fillmore, was eying the little dwarf curiously. Then he grinned at Beak Toll.

"I see you got your face marked plenty, cap. I suppose it was the little fellow what done it."

"Shut up," Beak Toll growled. "Just for that you stay on guard here. Go up to the house. On the second floor, you'll find two people lying on beds. They've been gassed. Stay with them, and tell the saw-bones you'll find there, to take the stiff down to the morgue."

Silas Sneed looked for a moment with great dignity at Toll. "What is the meaning of this, sir?" he said.

"You're under arrest," Beak Toll said.

"I realize that. I'm not referring to that fact," said Silas. "I'm referring to your remark of a few minutes ago that I was to be placed in a padded cell; that I was 'nuts,' by which I suppose you mean I'm insane. That's slander, captain, I warn you that I'll hold you responsible. I'm certainly not mad."

"O. K., Mr. Sneed," said Beak Toll warily. "I take it all back." Nevertheless he gave one of the plain-clothes men a warning wink. He told them to drive up to the house to fetch Disk and take him along.

"Book him as a material witness. I don't think he's in on this, but I'll sleep better if he's out of here, too," Toll said.

It was late in the afternoon when Toll got back to the Sneed house. He found Kathleen and Dick Snowden in the library.

"He won't let us leave," Kathleen said indignantly, indicating the watchful Sergeant Fillmore.

"We can fix that in no time. There are just a few questions I want to ask you to sort of round out my case," Captain Toll said as he waved Fillmore out of the room.

"That gas wasn't intended for you," Captain Toll explained to Kathleen. "It was intended for Claude, but maybe I better begin at the beginning. I've just come from a long talk with Silas. He can talk on for hours just like you and me. It is only when you get him on the subject of money or murder that you find out that he's absolutely goofy."

"The first thing he did when he heard his old man died was to come back here, posing as a cripple, paralyzed from the waist down. He had, from the beginning, figured out that he was going to do a little killing and this cripple business was to be his alibi. He had consulted Lombardy on the symptoms of paralysis and the doc got the whole thing out of Silas after a few interviews. Lombardy saw a chance to clean up for himself, so he offered to go along ready to testify that Silas was crippled, and also to do any little odd jobs around the house that might be necessary to locate the fortune that Abner Sneed had hidden."

"A couple of months ago, Minton Sneed died with a knife in his heart. It was supposed to be suicide. What happened was this. Minton had hit upon the secret of that will you

were telling me about, that is, he had hit upon part of it—the first and third lines I think it was—and like a nitwit he told Silas about it, gloating over it, figuring, I think, that Silas couldn't get up and look for the money even if he knew the whole business.

"Silas got out of his bed in the middle of the night during the next week and swiped one of Lombardy's scalpels. With that he worked on the lower panel of Minton's door. Those scalpels are sharp as hell. But when he got done, he found that the hole wasn't big enough for him to go through. And then, by gosh, an accident happened.

"Claude somehow got loose out of that room where they kept him locked up the night after Silas had finished making that panel in the door of Minton's room. And Claude, wandering about the house, stumbled into Silas's room late at night. Silas hadn't seen the little dwarf for years, but of course he knew about him, knew where he was kept, because old Abner Sneed had had that room built when they brought Claude back from the sanitarium about ten years ago after it was established that Claude couldn't be cured.

"Well, Claude's size gave Silas an idea. Claude could get through that opening Silas had made. Silas worked on Claude for a few days, told him how he, himself, was being held prisoner in that house, and that if they could get rid of Minton and maybe some of the others, he would take Claude away. Claude was crazier than Silas, and it was no trick to get him worked up to the point where he stuck Lombardy's scalpel into Minton. Silas put the little door back in place with narrow strips of adhesive tape stuck on the edges so they wouldn't be noticed, and took Claude back to his little cell.

"I don't know whether the Glaydens or Disk suspected it was murder. Perhaps the bolted door fooled them into thinking it was suicide. Anyway, the family didn't want any scandal, so I imagine they had a little talk with Heinemann, the D. A., and the thing got hushed up.

"The only man who knew that Minton's death wasn't suicide, outside of Claude and Silas, was Lombardy. He was in on Silas's plans. Lombardy, thinking things over, figured that in the end Silas would be the one to get the money, definitely decided to tie up with him. He suggested the scheme of connecting a gas pipe with the air vents in Claude's room. The house is old and was originally lighted with gas. It was no trick at all for a man of Lombardy's skill to hook up the pipes and fix that valve in Silas's room. The idea was that when it came to making a get-away, they would finish up Claude and anybody else who was left by getting them into that little room. There would then be only Silas and Lombardy to divide, and no Claude to tell what had happened.

"After Minton's death, Silas got Glayden and Matilda to move to Minton's room on some pretext, and when he heard that Glayden was on the verge of discovering where the fortune was, he put little Claude to work once more. Then, later, he did in Lombardy because Lombardy was threatening blackmail. But Silas was scared to take Claude back to his room because I was in the house. Besides, with Lombardy dead, Silas, knowing where the securities were hidden, figured he'd make a get-away right off, and that even if I found Claude he'd be the one to be arrested for the murders. That's why Silas didn't even go back to close that little opening in the

door of the room where Lombardy was killed. It was additional proof that little Claude had done it. The trouble was that Claude for once had missed and hadn't killed Lombardy outright.

"Lombardy, dying, had only one idea and that was to get even with Silas and Claude. I gave him his chance while I was searching the grounds. Lombardy sneaked into Silas's room. Silas had gotten up prepared to leave the house, and when he heard Lombardy coming in, he ducked behind the door and let him have it with a candlestick; then he sneaked out. But even then Lombardy wasn't entirely dead. Silas had gotten away from him, but there was still Claude, whom he assumed to be locked up in his room, and Lombardy made his dying effort, crawling on his stomach to where the valve was and turned on the gas." Beak Toll stopped for a minute and looked at Kathleen. "In a way, you tipped me off," he said, "to where I could find Silas, when you said in your sleep, 'In windlass of well.' That's where the securities were hidden that Silas was after. The windlass was hollow and we found them inside; but how did you know?"

"The message which old Abner left in his will read," Kathleen said:

"I men without me
The sailor's friend and one in every port
O' flight without light
As you seek I wish you no ill.

The first line means 'in.' The second line, 'The sailor's friend' is 'wind,' and 'one in every port' is a 'girl' or 'lass.' That gives you 'windlass.' 'O' flight without light' means 'of,' and the last line—if you don't wish somebody ill you wish them well. Thus, 'In windlass of well.'"

"I'll be damned," Beak Toll said. He stood up and looked at the other two. "You two can go whenever you want to, or you can stay here for a while, I guess. I won't be bothering you. In case you two should take it into your heads to get married or something, it seems to me that you, Miss Croydon, are entitled to that money that New York lawyer promised you, or at least part of it. I guess it's none of my business though." With that Beak Toll wandered out.

Dick Snowden looked at Kathleen and said: "How about it?"

"How about getting married, you mean?"

"Right," said Dick Snowden.

"Why you don't even know my first name," Kathleen said.

"Dearest' is good enough for me," said Dick Snowden.



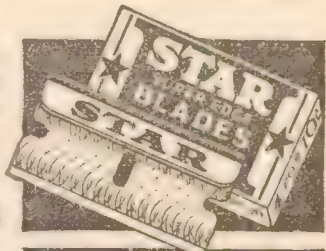
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HE STOPPED ON THE BRIDGE AND HEAVED CAMPBELL OVER INTO THE DARK RUSHING WATER.

TERROR STALKED

BY T. T. FLYNN

BY the ninth day Drake's hatred of San Andres had the corrosive bite of powerful acid. And his fear of Cranston's arrival gnawed endlessly. For Cranston would be coming; Cranston would be following until the handcuffs snapped and the return trip was started.

There had been no doubt of that when Cranston's heavysset, phlegmatic figure plodded into the Hotel *Del Americas* in Panama City. Cranston evidently had ridden the Trans-Isthmian railroad from Colon, arriving ahead of the next steamer through the Canal.

Drake had gotten his bags from his own side-street hotel before his panicky rush to the water front. That morning he'd noticed the *Gallino Grande*, a ratty little coastal schooner, taking on the last of a

nondescript cargo. Fifteen minutes before lines were cast off Drake had hurried aboard the *Gallino Grande*.

The fat Portuguese-Spanish captain had listened with a shrewd, heavy-lidded look. He had known at once that something was wrong with this red-faced stranger in well-tailored whites.

Four hundred pesos, the captain had stated blandly, would buy a passage as far north as San Andres, where the *Gallino Grande* would turn back south again.

Drake had cursed him for a bloody pirate—and emptied his bill fold to pay the four hundred pesos. Cranston wouldn't be in San Andres—for a time at least.

Now the low hills behind San Andres rolled up like prison walls. The hot wind off the oily Pacific raised dust in the narrow streets.

Days were scorching, nights sweltering—and any day Cranston would be along, unhurried, relentless as Fate.

When Drake thought of the heavy-set detective, a cold knot formed in his middle, leaving him sick, weak. There was something terrible, something so implacable about this dogged pursuit. Cranston was like an impersonal robot, a machine that would follow tirelessly to the end.

Drake caught himself now and then rubbing his wrists, where nerves crawled as if the steel bands were already there. He lost weight, and brooded on the screened hotel veranda as he sipped flat beer by the hour to wash the dry dust from his throat.

If he hadn't put the money in that Miami safe-deposit box! If he'd only had a thousand more in his money belt when Cranston entered the Miami hotel room! If he'd killed Cranston that morning instead of stunning him with a heavy boot tree!

But he had been panic-stricken, thinking only of making the next Pan-American plane to Havana. He hadn't stopped for the money. And now the lean and formal hotel manager was acquiring a warning restraint as the first week's bill went unpaid.

Opposite the hotel veranda was the pink stucco railroad station, where the trains left twice daily. Money would take a man across to the east coast, or up the branch line to the north, toward Mexico. A man could go crazy thinking while the rickety little yellow trains pulled out each day, and the last few dollars dwindled, and Cranston, out beyond the horizon somewhere, was coming closer. It was like a steel spring winding tighter, tighter.

This ninth night the heat was like

a scalding robe. Inside the mosquito netting Drake tossed and perspired until sheet and mattress were wet. Near morning he slept fitfully and dreamed that Cranston's handcuffs were on his wrists. He came awake on the floor, perspiring, trembling, a cry of protest echoing in his ears.

A brassy dawn was thrusting over the glassy Pacific. Drake paced the floor for an hour, lighting one cigarette from another. Finally he gave up trying to sleep, and went down to breakfast, fighting off the fear. He was spooning a cold melon in the cavernous dining room when the manager bowed and placed a duplicate bill on the cloth.

"Señor, we are sad—ees necessary—the bookkeeping, *no es verdad?*"

Drake's face had been flabby in the shaving mirror. Circles were dark under his eyes. Nerves were raw. He frowned a challenge to the shrewd dark eyes contemplating him.

"Worried about your money, eh?"

An expressive Latin shrug brushed away the idea. "I 'ave try to explain, señor."

Drake thrust the bill in his coat. "Later. I'm eating now."

"*Mil gracias, señor.* Any time to-day."

Drake glowered after the narrow shoulders and stiff back, and picked up the spoon. But the melon gagged him. To-day! This was the finish in San Andres. A native fishing boat might be going up the coast a few miles. Anything now. It was worth a look at the water front.

San Andres held a few Americans. Drake had kept away from them. The less they knew, the less they could tell. He couldn't turn to any of them for help. On the way to the water front he passed two-wheeled carts, plodding porters, native women in gay skirts and blouses. The peeling stucco on the low build-

ings was faded and shabby in the blinding sunlight. It was an alien place, without hope.

One small pier extended out from shore. Boats of any size anchored well offshore. Passengers and freight were carried back and forth in the big lighters and smaller boats. Stacks of coffee bags in the warehouse at the shore end of the pier gave off the pungent smell of green coffee. And half a mile offshore a small freight steamer was nosing in to anchor.

The ship was coming from the south. Drake had a premonition of disaster as he watched the small boats and big lighters moving out over the swells.

He was waiting in the shade at the at the corner of the pier shed when the first small boat rowed up to the pier. A sling chair dropped from a derrick for the passengers coming ashore. And there was no mistaking the first broad-shouldered figure that clambered into the chair.

Cranston! Cranston coming in from some little coastal town to the south to search San Andres! Drake's knees went weak. He had to struggle against breaking into a run as he headed back to town.

Cranston didn't know that Drake was in San Andres or word would have been radioed ahead for his arrest. But quickly now Cranston would know. There wasn't a fishing boat available. No chance to escape that way. Drake tried to keep his face blank, but inside the panic had seized him again.

The wind lifted a swirl of dust, and Drake lifted his head into the stinging particles as a shrill train whistle knifed through the heat. That would be the morning train ready to leave.

Inland where the train was going, the high mountains held trails and

little-known roads, forests, Indian villages, vague little towns, cocoa and banana plantations and coffee *fincas*. Country like that could swallow a stranger for a time. Drake made for the station at a run, ignoring the staring natives he shouldered out of his way.

The luggage would have to stay at the hotel. No time to get it, and he couldn't pay the bill anyway. The usual crowd of natives was milling about the waiting string of yellow wooden coaches. The engine bell was ringing when Drake rushed into the station and shoved his last three American dollars and seventy-eight cents in local silver into the ticket window.

"Ticket up the line somewhere! Savvy? Hurry up! I don't want to miss this train!"

"You wan' go w'are, señor?"

"Anywhere! Any station! I'm just going for the ride. I—er—I'm coming back to-day! Savvy? To-day! How far can I go for this money?" And Drake remembered just in time. "Second class—third class—whatever's cheapest! I want to go as far as I can."

"You wan' second class, señor?"

"Dammit, yes! Anything! If you make me miss that train I'll murder you!" Drake gulped frantically. He knew the man thought he was drunk. It didn't matter, with Cranston coming ashore there at the pier.

The train was moving when he snatched the ticket and dashed outside, fighting his way through the noisy crowd of natives. He caught one of the last coaches, and discovered then that he had a second-class ticket to Las Vegas, wherever that was, and that he had boarded a second-class coach.

The hard wooden seats held stocky broad-faced Indians in

blouses and knee-length trousers, and their gayer dressed women, and native men and women and children and babies, and bundles, packages, and bags. The sweltering interior reeked. There was no place to sit down. From the moment Drake appeared in the doorway he was an object of curiosity to every one in the car.

Even the officious little conductor stared when he pushed through for the tickets. But none of that mattered; each turn of the wheels was putting Cranston farther behind.

Beyond the tracks cattle grazed in fields of tall *jaragua* grass. Patches of tropical woodland slid past. Palms were numerous. For ten minutes the track passed the tall, broad-leaved growth of a banana plantation. Clusters of bamboo huts were frequent, and there was a rush for the door as the clattering train slowed to a jolting stop at the first little native town.

Drake swung off the steps, welcoming the hot sun and fresh air. The coach had become a reeking oven.

A native woman thrust out a tray of cooked armadillo flesh; other women with trays of fruits and foods swarmed under the train windows shrilling their appeals to buy. Drake waved them aside and walked forward, mopping his face, watching furtively for some sign of an officer who might be looking for him.

A hand touched his arm. He jumped, gritted his teeth for control as a cheerful request followed.

"Haven't a match, have you?"

An American drawled that cheerfully, smiling from a face tanned almost as dark as one of the Quiche Indians in the rear coaches.

"Damned hot, isn't it?" said the stranger as he took the matches. "A day of the coast here and I'm fed

up. If I couldn't stay up in the hills, I'd pull out."

He wasn't an officer. No danger here. Drake relaxed. And because the panic was still with him, and he had the lost feeling of a hunted man, he picked up the conversation. "Live around here, do you?"

"Back up above Pajarito," was the cheerful reply. "I'm in coffee up there in a small way."

"I see. Anywhere near Las Vegas?"

"Thirty miles or so this side. Not going to that little pest hole, are you?"

"I'm not going anywhere in particular," said Drake slowly. "I'm—er—taking a trip up the line for some local color."

"Tourist?"

"Writer."

The stranger chuckled. He was nearing thirty, and looked fit and cheerful.

"I was wondering," he confessed, "what you were doing back in the rear coaches. I saw you getting off. Plenty of atmosphere in that crowd, eh? Visit my place and you'll get some real scenery. It's hours back from the railroad, up in the foothills, and local color is there if you like it."

Drake felt like a drowning man who has caught a plank; he had to try to appear casual. "Sounds pretty much cut off from everything."

"Too much so," was the rueful reply. "Nothing much but Indians around. A guest is a godsend. Why don't you come along for a visit? I'm on the *finca* alone. You'd be doing me a favor."

The whistle blew. Drake had no trouble making his decision.

"I'll take you up on it. Name's Drake."

"Campbell," the stranger introduced himself. "We get off at

Pajarito. There's room up ahead if you've had enough local color in those back coaches."

"I'll see it through to Pajarito," said Drake hastily, and hurried to the rear as the train moved.

Pajarito had the same types of gayly-dressed Indian women crowding alongside the train with their sweets and food and fruit. The same kind of bamboo huts straggled along the tracks, with here and there a towering *ceiba* tree throwing welcome shade.

"No luggage?" Campbell asked, as Drake joined him beside the train.

Drake had expected the question. "I thought I'd be going back to-day."

Campbell nodded understandingly, and gave his scuffed kit bag to a stocky native in patched trousers and a gaudy blue shirt who came to them.

"We're about the same size," said Campbell eyeing him. "I'll have everything you need. Hold your breath and hope we make the *finca* without any trouble."

They were following Campbell's bag to an old Model T touring car that had no top. The back seat was heaped with boxes, bundles and packages. The native squeezed in somehow with the bag, and Campbell took the wheel, with Drake beside him.

"The road's not so hot up near the *finca*. It would ruin a good car," explained Campbell as they started.

Drake forced a smile. Inwardly he was thinking about Cranston, wondering how long it would be before the detective would puzzle out the trail this far. How long before Cranston would pit his wits against the lush hills and mountains ahead.

Campbell drove with a cheerful disregard of ruts and bumps, raising a yellow dust cloud, scattering chickens, startling ox teams drag-

ging heavy two-wheeled carts loaded with sugar bags.

For some miles they passed cane fields and pastures of *jaragua* grass higher than a man's waist. Now and then there was a banana plantation, and little groups of bamboo huts were strung along the dusty road like beads on a dusty tropical necklace.

The road began to rise through the foothills; the sweltering midday heat of the lowlands grew appreciably less. They plunged through stretches of tropical forest; rattled the planks of small frail bridges that spanned brawling little hill streams.

The road grew narrower, rougher as the foothills rose higher and wilder. Campbell slowed down to pass a mule train in charge of bare-footed Indians in cotton blouses and knee-length trousers.

Rows of coffee trees filled some of the narrow valleys and marched along the hillsides high above. From the hill ridges over which they passed they could see the white-washed buildings of other coffee *fincas* in the far distance.

Campbell said: "It's mostly coffee from here up. The higher you go, the better coffee you get. I should have bought a couple of thousand feet higher than I did."

To make conversation, Drake said: "Do coffee growers do well?"

"Sometimes," said Campbell cheerfully. "The big *fincas* do nicely when Brazil coffee doesn't swamp the world price too much. I've been hanging on by my finger nails for six years."

"That doesn't sound so profitable."

Campbell shrugged, chuckled.

"You can't judge by my case. I took over a little rundown *finca*, and didn't have enough capital. Coffee prices have been low. Some day I'll get my hands on five or six

thousand of extra money and shape the place up. You might spread the word among your investing friends. Interest rates are attractive."

"I'll remember it," Drake promised with a smile.

Inwardly he wondered what Campbell would do if aware of the four thousand dollars reward on his passenger's head. Cash money. Easy to be had. Get word to the authorities, and when the prisoner was turned over to Cranston the money was earned. But Campbell didn't know that; with luck he wouldn't know until too late.

The rough narrow road wound back and up through the foothills, and at times they could see the higher mountains piling massively ahead. The small valley up which Campbell finally turned was like a green gem sprawled between two folds of lush hills. Here were fir trees and eucalyptus trees, and within a mile or so they came to rows of low bushy coffee trees growing under other trees that towered high.

"*Guajinquin* trees," Campbell explained. "They give shade for the coffee trees."

Indian huts clustered on the bank of a small stream; a quarter of a mile farther on a neat whitewashed bungalow dominated several smaller whitewashed buildings. A wrinkled Quiche woman and man waited on the bungalow steps as Campbell and his guest drove up.

Campbell swung out of the car, beaming.

"Welcome to *Finca del Campbell*. José and Justifina run the house; make it your own while you're here."

Campbell meant it, too. He was a cheerfully naïve fellow, pathetically glad to have a guest from the States. Drake saw clearly the rest of the afternoon and evening that

not many people got back here in the hills. Campbell had been leading a lonely life for years.

Sheer luck meeting him. A man didn't need money back in here. Cranston would be a wizard if he bayed the trail this far. There was time to think, to plan how to get back to the States, back to Miami and that locked safe-deposit box holding the packets of currency that would smooth out everything.

There would be some way of getting enough money out of Campbell when the time came to leave. In a pleasant glow from Campbell's whisky high balls and good cigars, comfortable in a suit of Campbell's pajamas, Drake fell off to sleep with those ideas in his mind.

But morning again brought gnawing doubt about Cranston. Questions at the railroad ticket window would give Cranston the direction in which his quarry had started. Cranston might find that his man had left the train at Pajarito. At least he would know that the ticket had been bought only to Las Vegas. Cranston would nose about, ask questions, leave no scrap of chance uninvestigated.

Campbell was out early, busy about the *finca*. Dozens of Indians worked about the place. Strolling about under the towering *guajinquin* trees, Drake stared at the stolid brown faces, and agreed that Campbell's life here must be lonely, cut off from the world, isolated, monotonous.

Campbell was pathetically proud of his little *finca*. Drake listened with a show of interest to details of coffee growing, picking, preparing the berries for shipment. And of Campbell's plans for enlarging the *finca*, improving it, buying more coffee land higher in the hills. All that was needed was money.

There was a certain sardonic

amusement in knowing that the money Campbell needed had ridden up from the lowlands with him, and was being solicitously cared for until it departed.

"Money?" Campbell had said in answer to a casual question. "Yes, I have to keep quite a bit of silver and small currency in the house. I've never lost any. These Quiches are honest. Now and then one hacks another with a machete, but it's usually hushed up among themselves. I could leave a basketful of silver on the living-room floor." Campbell laughed. "Justifina and José would see to that."

Campbell displayed the money carelessly that evening, bringing a large tin dispatch box from his bedroom to the living-room table and counting out small sums against a list of accounts.

"Some of the hands are going back to their villages until coffee-picking time," he explained. "They like to show silver when they get home."

Drake stared at the neat little stack of American bills in the top tray that Campbell lifted out. Money there for the taking that would get a man back to Miami. And yet could a man get away with it? Before he went to sleep that night Drake pondered the question. The two Indian servants, José and Justifina, were no obstacle. Often out of the house, they barely understood English, accepted their master's guest dumbly, served him with polite eagerness.

Campbell was the obstacle. Drake suspected there'd be little chance of getting a loan. Campbell needed money too badly; the moment the subject was breached, he'd be suspicious.

Violence wouldn't do. The risk was too great. Or—was it? All the next day Drake weighed the mat-

ter coolly. And it was hard to be cool, with Cranston out there somewhere in the lowlands patiently seeking the lost threads that would lead to his man.

At any time Cranston might appear. The exuberant first illusion of safety was rapidly vanishing. The tension once more was drawing tighter. Furtively Drake began to watch the road leading in from the outside world; and two mornings later he was startled when Campbell announced cheerfully:

"I'm driving down to Pajarito to-day for some machinery parts I ordered. They should be in by now. Care to come along?"

"I should be getting back," Drake hedged, while he judged this change of the picture.

Campbell protested vigorously.

"Hell, man, you've hardly arrived! I didn't mean to put that idea in your mind. If things are getting monotonous, we can drive back in the mountains to-morrow and visit some of the Quiche villages. All the color in the world for you there. How about it?"

"Not a bad idea."

Campbell's relief was plain. "Coming down to the railroad with me?"

"I'll stay up here where it's cool," Drake decided.

He would have liked the trip. But the farther he stayed from the railroad, the less chance there was of Cranston's hearing about his presence in the locality.

Campbell rattled off in the old touring car. He was back before dark, dusty and hungry.

"The heat's pretty bad down below to-day," he said briefly, before hurrying in to wash and change for dinner. "You were wise not to go."

For some reason Campbell was not his usual talkative self at dinner. Drake surprised an estimating

stare across the table. Instantly his nerves were brittle. Something had happened; something was on Campbell's mind. He probed casually:

"You look off your feed. Anything happen to-day?"

Campbell was embarrassed. He pushed a hand through his blond hair, leaving it awry and disheveled, and reached for a cigarette, which he lighted before he spoke. And he stared at the tablecloth and spoke rather gruffly.

"I met a chap at Pajarito—a fellow who said his name was Cranston."

The shaded lamp on the table put their faces in partial shadows. Insects were rasping in the night outside the screened windows; the movements of the Indian women back in the kitchen were not audible, so that they were alone, with the lighted table and the sudden quiet between them.

And to Drake terror stalked noiselessly through the quiet and stood in the shadows by his shoulder. Muscles and nerves knotted once more behind his belt; he was close to nausea, and the short hairs at the back of his neck prickled with a chill sensation of danger.

Cranston! He admitted now that he had been afraid all day that something would happen down there at the railroad where Cranston might have passed. His lips moved stiffly. "Cranston, eh? Does he live around here?"

Campbell's reply had the same flat colorlessness, as if Campbell were submerging his personality and opinions behind mere statements of fact. Campbell's eyes did not lift from the tablecloth.

"No, Cranston doesn't live around here. He's a detective from the States, looking for a man named Halworthy, who got away with quite a bit of money from a bank where he'd

been an assistant cashier. Cranston represents the bonding company, which has offered a reward of four thousand dollars for Halworthy's return. It seems that Cranston is convinced that Halworthy left San Andres hurriedly the other day on the train, and may have gotten off somewhere along the line and headed back into the mountains. Cranston was asking questions around Pajarito. He told me that in San Andres, Halworthy was calling himself Drake."

"Well," said Drake, and his voice was hoarse, unnatural, "what did you do about it? Where is Cranston?"

Campbell knocked ashes in the little pottery ash tray, and made a negative gesture with the cigarette.

"You get to seeing things a bit differently back in here alone," he said mildly, without looking up. "The States are a long way off. Things that are important back home don't bulk so large here. A chap in my position gets to accepting men as he finds them. What has happened somewhere else doesn't matter so much. I'm not the bonding company. I'm not a detective. A guest under my roof is a guest." Campbell cleared his throat. "I assured this man that there wasn't much chance of Halworthy's being back in these hills. He seemed satisfied, suggesting he was going to look on toward Las Vegas. He seemed to think Halworthy was making a break across to the east coast, to go north or south from there."

"You passed up a chance to get that reward?"

Campbell shrugged, smiled thinly, and looked up across the table. His eyes were calm.

"Sorry, but I'd rather borrow what I need than angle for it by turning a guest over for a reward."

Drake filled his chest with a long

breath. His voice was near cracking. "You're a damn funny fellow then."

"Perhaps."

"Well, what are you going to do?"

"Nothing," said Campbell. "What could I do?"

"Go after that reward."

"I gave you my idea of that."

"Want me to leave then, I suppose?"

"No, I don't think so," said Campbell. "You're still the same chap I was glad to have here. What happened somewhere else doesn't interest me much. Maybe there were reasons. I'm not judging. Suppose we forget about it—and make that trip to the Quiche villages tomorrow as we planned?"

Drake kept his face stolid, and after a moment nodded.

"Damned decent of you. I'll be glad to go."

Campbell smiled as if a load were off his mind, and got up and went to the sideboard and took out the bottle of curacao, which he seemed to like, and filled the small liqueur glasses. They talked of other things after they moved out onto the veranda with the liqueur and cigars. He was trying to make himself agreeable and ease his guest's mind.

Was the fellow a fool? Did he think his little act was going over? Did he suppose his story about not wanting the reward was believed? When he needed the money so badly!

The only question was—why hadn't Campbell brought the detective back with him? What had the two of them planned to do? Why had Campbell mentioned the matter at all? Probably to make sure that his guest was the right man. And Cranston probably had stayed behind to get in touch with the local authorities, so the arrest would con-

form with local law. The chances were Cranston would be along in the morning—or waiting for them when they got back from the Quiche villages.

There you had everything, neat and perfect from Campbell's viewpoint. And with the answer so plain, the solution was not hard to get.

Drake was arranging the details in his mind as he told Campbell good night. There must be no loopholes. Every move now must be perfect—every move from this little coffee *finca* to the safe-deposit box in Miami!

Surprisingly Drake was almost relieved that the thing had come to a head, because Campbell was fool enough to tip his hand. The next moves had to happen now, and under other circumstances they would not have been so easy.

The two Indian servants slept out from the house. The nearest Indian huts were some distance away. Outside the screened windows the night throbbed and vibrated with insect sounds, booming frogs, the calls and occasional trills of night birds.

The house had lapsed into uncanny quiet when Drake finally eased out of bed and slipped into his clothes. A board creaked in the floor as he groped to the door in his socks.

The bedrooms opened off the central living room. A small electric bulb burned all night in the living room. Drake opened his door, and had all the light he needed to quietly tear a pillow cover into one long strip of cloth.

His hands felt cold and stiff as he folded the strong linen into a tight rope some five feet long. Standing inside the bedroom doorway, he tested the result. The rope would hold the weight of several men. It

was more than strong enough to loop around Campbell's neck and garrote life quickly from the struggling body.

Hand to hand, Campbell would be the better man. But he'd be dying before he waked and knew what was happening. Drake tried to flex the stiffness out of his cold hands. His mouth was dry, his heart was pounding slow and hard.

Inwardly he damned the reflexes he couldn't control. He'd never killed a man before, but he knew calmly and coldly that Campbell had to die. It was the only out. Campbell was ready to turn him over to Cranston. Campbell was the one person who could stop Drake tonight, who could give the alarm if he got away.

Self-preservation was the first law—and Campbell shouldn't have been fool enough to sleep to-night.

Drake stepped softly out of the bedroom. His shadow crept furtively along the living-room wall beside him as he tiptoed toward the door of Campbell's room.

Another board creaked loudly under his weight. Bed springs gave audibly in Campbell's room. Drake stood with his heart hammering as Campbell's sleepy voice called: "That you, Drake?"

Damn the fellow for sleeping so lightly! Drake swallowed, and his throat was tight.

Campbell called again, more sharply: "Are you up, Drake?" The bed rustled as Campbell sat up.

"I couldn't sleep," Drake said. "I thought I'd have a cigarette out on the veranda and see if it would help."

And Campbell answered him calmly. "I'll have a cigarette with you as long as I'm awake."

Campbell was suspicious then! Wanted to make sure he wasn't leaving! A smoldering rage flared

up, so that Drake felt the veins distending at his temples and the fire of it burning under his hair.

Throttling Campbell was out of the question now. Awake and on his feet, Campbell could take care of himself. And there wouldn't be another chance to-night, and to-morrow would be too late.

Near Campbell's door a machete with a sharkskin handle and a fine steel blade rested on pegs in the wall as an ornament. Drake pulled the doubled linen rope under his belt, and reached the machete in two silent steps, and swung it up just as Campbell opened the door and came out, saying:

"I shouldn't have said anything at dinner. Might have known it would——"

Campbell saw the machete blade coming down. Stunned surprise flashed across his face. He tried to duck and parry with his arm. The flat of the heavy steel blade knocked his arm down and clubbed him sickeningly on the head.

Drake struck with the flat of the blade. There must be no bloody mess for the servants to find the first thing in the morning. He heard clearly the meaty crunch of steel on hair and bone.

Campbell's eyes snapped shut under the shock. His face went slack and he reeled back against the wall. Then his eyes opened, and he pawed feebly as Drake dropped the machete and pinned him against the wall and jammed the linen rope around his neck.

Campbell knew what was happening. He had little strength, but the agonized horror of it was in his gasp:

"Don't, Drake!! I'm your friend! I'm trying to help you! D-don't do——"

The linen jerked tight around his neck and cut the rest of it off. Drake

grunted with the effort. The loop sank into the corded neck.

Campbell beat at him with returning strength. Campbell's eyes were wide now and beginning to pop, and purplish-red congestion spread over his face.

The two men stumbled, fell heavily, and rolled on the floor. Campbell's fists beat in a frenzy. He caught Drake's wrists. The strength of desperation had returned. His fingers sank deep and painfully into the flesh. He twisted so, that Drake gasped with the pain of wrenching muscles.

The machete was a step away. Drake realized he could jump to the weapon and end everything with a stroke of the sharp blade. But there must be no blood, not even if Campbell freed his neck.

Campbell was horrible to look at now, with his eyes seeming to bulge from the sockets and agony in every line of his purpling face.

And then, quite suddenly, Campbell's struggles diminished, as the spent spring of a clock might run down. Campbell's tongue protruded from his mouth. He went limp. A few minutes later it was all over.

Drake left the knot around Campbell's neck and staggered to his feet like a drunken man. He was panting, shaking, weak, and suddenly sick, so that he had to run outside for a moment.

They had made little sound. The night noises were still going on. The stars were bright and cold in a cloudless sky, and the cool night air was a bracer. Drake had control of himself when he reentered the house.

The money box was the first thing. He got it from the bedroom, and Campbell's keys from the trousers pocket. He brought Campbell's

clothes and shoes out with the money box, and put them on the floor and went into his own bedroom and finished dressing.

He needed a shave, and forced himself into the bathroom for that ordeal with Campbell's shaving kit, which he had been using.

His face looked white and drawn in the mirror. His eyes stared back at him like the eyes of a stranger. Drake shivered as he snapped off the light and escaped from the sight of himself.

The old touring car was parked beside the house. Drake carried the money box and Campbell's clothes out and put them on the front seat; then he staggered out with Campbell's pajama-clad body and pushed it into the back seat.

He was cool enough now to make another trip back in and straighten out the straw mat where they had fought, and wipe the machete blade free of any incriminating hair and replace it on the pegs. A last look around showed no trace of any trouble.

The automobile starter ground harshly for a moment, and then the cacophony of the motor drowned out the night noises. The headlights reached whitely ahead as Drake drove slowly along the *finca* road, past the stately *guajinquit* trees and the little cluster of native huts where dogs barked and fell behind.

No natives came out to see who was passing. The *finca* slept, and the dark looming hills around barred the outer world. In the morning there would be no one to question Campbell's absence. He had spoken before his servants of the trip to the Quiche villages. They would think he had left before daylight with his guest.

The life of the *finca* would go on for a day, two days; perhaps more with luck. If Cranston showed up, he could only wait for the return. And by the time Cranston moved to do anything, it might be days before he could be certain what steps to take. By that time it would be too late.

Drake drove carefully down the descending hill road. Some miles down he came to a bridge that he had in mind.

He stopped on the bridge and heaved Campbell over into the dark rushing water that came out of a jungle-choked ravine and vanished into more jungle. He dropped Campbell's clothes and shoes into the water, and transferred the bills in the money box to his bill fold, and put as much of the silver as he could conveniently carry into his pockets, and tossed the rest with the box into the water before driving on.

Travel stopped on this road in the night. Twice in the miles ahead small camp fires winked near the road where mule trains and heavy carts had stopped for the night; but that was all.

The chill grew less as the road dropped down to the lowlands. Dawn was touching the sky when Drake reached a crossroads which Campbell had pointed out on the way up.

Straight ahead was Pajarito and the railroad. To the right, north along the coastal belt of lowlands, was the village of Santa Margarita, and the northern branch of the railroad, which led to the border. North over the border was Mexico, and the Mexican railroad, and the airways which made the United States a matter of hours. And there was more than enough gasoline to reach Santa

Margarita. José had filled the tank from rattling tin cans at dinner time for the trip into the mountains to-day.

Drake relaxed, and drove more leisurely along the Santa Margarita road. Small chance of meeting Cranston now. Cranston would come to the *finca* from Pajarito. The road ahead was clear, and plenty of time to make the morning train north. Drake shook off the memories of the night, felt the thick bill fold inside his coat, and grinned and began to whistle as tension left him and the calm certainty of safety brought a warm glow.

There proved to be time to drive to the next stop north of Santa Margarita. Valdones was the place. Drake left the car on the outskirts of the neat little village, walked past the whitewashed church to the railroad, got his ticket, and caught the morning train north without trouble.

No one paid any attention to him. The sunlight outside the train windows was blinding. The midmorning heat of the lowlands was beginning to be uncomfortable, but that didn't matter now. Drake turned back the empty seat ahead, put his feet up and relaxed into a doze with a half smile. It was like being born again to come out of the nightmare of flight and hopelessness into this calm of safety.

He was dozing and only dimly aware of the man who dropped into the seat beside him. The thing that brought him awake like a dash of cold water was the nightmarish feel of steel bands snapping around his wrists.

His straining wrists were the first thing he saw. A big hand jerked them down by the handcuff chain. A soft voice said: "Take it easy,

Halworthy! I'm ready for you this time!"

Little globules of perspiration were on Cranston's smiling face. The stocky, solid detective seemed vastly pleased with himself. His shoulder rubbed Drake's shoulder as he chuckled.

"I knew I'd catch you asleep sometime," said Cranston. "But I didn't figure you'd drop in my lap this way. I had to look twice to make sure it was you waiting back there for the train."

Drake tried to speak but his lips were frozen. The surprise of it had stunned him as surely as the machete had stunned Campbell. He thought of Campbell and shuddered. It was murder now!

"Funny," said Cranston, "how near I almost lost you. I was pretty sure you'd ducked into the hills back up the other railroad toward Pajarito and Las Vegas where you bought your ticket. But I talked to a coffee grower at Pajarito who said he was damn sure no one like you was back

in there; and at Las Vegas they hadn't seen you. So I stayed all night at Las Vegas—and a lousy bed it was—and doubled back north this way to-day on a hunch you'd doubled ahead of me. And damned if you didn't walk up and climb onto the train. What was the idea of laying low for a few days back there, and then busting out into the open this way? Why didn't you stay where you were safe? Who was helping you, anyway?"

Drake closed his eyes. He was shivering, as if fever had exploded in his veins. And scalding tears were creeping under his eyelids. Why hadn't he believed the truth when he heard it? Why hadn't he stayed where he was safe?

Cranston's comments put it into words.

"Never mind telling me. It'd probably be a lie. You're too crooked, Halworthy, to know much about the truth. And I guess by the time you get out of this mess, it won't matter much."

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FLASHLIGHTS FLAMED, AND SHOT THEIR BEAMS ACROSS THE ROOM IN A DOZEN DIRECTIONS.

NOSED OUT

BY HARRINGTON STRONG

Author of "The Foxhound's First Chance," etc.

CHAPTER I.

RADIO ALARM.

BEN RADLEY stood six feet four in his bare feet without trying to stretch himself. His shoulders were wide and bony. The remainder of his body was constructed after the general architectural plan of a bean pole. Hence, he had been called "Highpockets" for years.

Men had begun calling him that

down home in Arizona before he had attained his full growth. They continued calling him that while he was living in a ranch bunk house and learning to be a cow-puncher. Even after he had fought his way with fists and guns to the position of deputy sheriff, and was considered a man with whom one did not deal lightly, he remained "Highpockets."

When some land an uncle had left him suddenly began spouting oil from a hundred wells, and Ben Rad-

ley stepped into the millionaire class overnight, he continued to be "Highpockets."

He had won a reputation long before the oil wells made him a personage at the ripe old age of thirty. That reputation was for running down killers. Ben Radley hated a killer, because one had slain his father. On the trail of one of the killer ilk, Ben was bloodhound and avenging spirit combined.

As a deputy sheriff in one of the toughest counties of the State, Ben had met and conquered several of the killer class. It had not always been easy. On his body were two scars from gunshot wounds and a couple more which had been caused by knives.

But killers seemed to be growing scarce in the wilds of Arizona, except for the in-heat-of-anger kind, and they generally surrendered without a fight. And certain citizens remarked that a man with money piling up faster than he could spend it should be ashamed to hold a job needed by so many other good men out of work. So Highpockets resigned and turned in his star.

Then, while in town one day waiting in the barber shop to get a haircut, Highpockets picked up a newspaper and read how, in a Middle Western city of considerable size, there had been an unusual number of homicides during the last half year.

The newspaper commented on the inefficiency of the police force and hinted that the mayor should do something about it. But the principal point of interest in the story, as far as Highpockets was concerned, was that few of the killers had been apprehended and brought to justice.

"The boys up there ain't goin' at it right," Highpockets mused.

He tossed the newspaper aside, thought about it while getting his haircut, and "went to town" in reality, and not in the vernacular of the day.

Highpockets had influential connections, as a young oil millionaire is likely to have, and he discovered the power of money to cut red tape. His record at home was clean, his ability and courage unquestioned, his purpose plainly sincere, and a harassed mayor and chief of police made the way easy.

So Ben, "Highpockets," Radley, former deputy sheriff of the wide open spaces, attained appointment to the police force. He was immediately given a special assignment to the homicide squad, and pursued his life work of running down killers, using a radio prowl car instead of a pony, and working on pavements beneath electric lights, instead of in mesquite and chaparral beneath the stars.

He had a private agreement that his salary should go to the police pension fund, that he could work in his own way as long as he obeyed regulations, could buy his own prowl car, and could have "Lizard" with him.

Lizard was a Navajo Indian. He had been official tracker for Highpockets down home. To be in the city with Radley, whom he served as a faithful slave, he promised to wear clean shirts, use moccasins instead of going barefooted, take baths regularly, and remove the conspicuous red tribal band from around his head.

Highpockets leased a big apartment and furnished it in good taste. He lived there comfortably with Lizard, having a manservant do the work. And he bought a car.

That car was the talk of the town. It was long, low, stream-lined, black

with silver trim, and beneath the hood was a foreign-made motor of power almost unbelievable. The car was made of light-armor plate and had bulletproof glass and numerous gadgets, including a standard two-way short-wave radio set.

Highpockets spent the first month after his appointment getting acquainted with the city. Then he reported for regular duty, and for another month did nothing but cruise around and burn gas, the city being blessed with a season of peace.

On these long car prowls, Highpockets maintained a one-sided conversation with Lizard. He was doing so on this particular night.

"Down home," he was saying, "they call it a killin', but here it's a homicide."

"Uh!" Lizard agreed.

"Down home, an officer wears his star in plain sight on his vest like he was proud of't. Here, he keeps a dinky little badge in his pocket and flashes it like he was ashamed when he has to let folks know he's the law."

"Uh!" said Lizard.

"Down home, I'd just say I was a deputy, and if they didn't believe me I went right to work on'm anyhow. Down home, a deputy wore his gun on the outside where everybody could see it and where he could get at it right quick. Here, I've got to wear one hidden under my coat in a holster, like a sneakin' tinhorn gambler. Shucks! We used to scorn a man who wore his gun hidden."

"Uh!" Lizard grunted.

"You know somethin', Lizard? The way you said that, I believe you're right. Anyhow, you're sincere. Your argument's sound, a man might say. For instance——"

Highpockets suddenly ceased

speaking. He was driving slowly along a wide avenue, and it was within fifteen minutes of midnight. Highpockets was on the night prowl shift from choice.

Highpockets ceased speaking because the radio was crackling and humming. From it now came the nasal voice of the radio sergeant at headquarters:

"Calling cars 45 and 46! Cars 45 and 46. Get to No. 23 in Section B. It's a 202."

"Dog-gone!" Highpockets said. He swung the car to the curb and stopped, and began fumbling in his pocket for a little book. "Here's more cussed city foolishness, Lizard. That talk's in code. If you don't know what code is, I'll tell you. It's sayin' somethin' in a mixed-up language so you can't understand it yourself 'thout lookin' it up in this here book."

The radio was barking again:

"Cars 73 and 104, take that call also. Snap into it! Hold everybody on the spot. Squad's on the way."

"Gosh, Lizard!" Highpockets said. "Maybe the sergeant means the homicide squad, and we belong to that. Maybe I'd better tune in with this gadget and talk to that boy at headquarters, if he ain't powerful busy."

The radio cut him short:

"Highpockets! Highpockets! Special car No. 6," it barked. "Wherever you are, go to No. 23 in Section B. It's a 202. Do your stuff, boy. Report to Sergeant O'Toole."

Highpockets heard it all, but he was busy turning over the pages of the little book, holding it beneath the dash light. He found Section B, and ran his finger down the column until he came to No. 23. The book said No. 23 was the Rockville Country Club.

Then, Highpockets turned swiftly to the page where crimes and misdemeanors were designated by numbers—he hadn't been on the job long enough to memorize them yet—and found 202. There it was:

"202—Homicide, Class A; caution."

Highpockets had been compelled to attend a few lectures at headquarters with the rookie cops—though he felt ridiculous going to school to learn how to catch a killer, when he had run down many of them, captured a few singlehanded, shot it out with several, and brought some in tied across their own saddles face downward—so he knew what the "caution" meant.

A "Class-A" homicide was when the victim and others involved were persons of some importance, and officers were supposed to be polite and almost apologetic as they went about their work, and so avoid repercussions.

"It's a tony killin', Lizard, out at the Rockville Country Club," Highpockets said. "We're on the trail, Navajo chief! Get your eyes and your smeller ready, 'cause you may have some trackin' to do."

CHAPTER II.

MURDER SCENE.

IN his ranch days, it had been said of Highpockets that when sent to town for the mail he rode like a man making a get-away from a posse. As a deputy sheriff, he had always demanded a pony with speed as well as stamina. Highpockets liked speed. To him, this car he was driving was only a couple of hundred horses bundled together so he could handle them easily. That meant real speed. Sensing what was coming, Lizard crouched down low in the seat, held

on tight, and prayed to his gods, both Indian and Christian.

Highpockets touched another gadget, and two red headlights appeared on the car beside the regular ones, as a warning to all that this wild ride was official. He touched another gadget, and the electrically-driven siren began its spasmodic screeching.

Lizard closed his eyes and held his breath, and wished he knew more gods to beseech in his behalf. Highpockets left the avenue, cut wildly through a cross street, slewed around a corner, scraped against another vehicle, and at last had turned into a broad boulevard which ran to the outskirts of the city and their destination, and where the traffic was light at that hour.

Far ahead were other cars with red lights and sirens, and far behind—and getting farther behind every split second—were a couple more. The Rockville Country Club was some distance away, the sprawling building far back from the highway in the midst of green acres.

"We won't be the first to get there, dang it!" Highpockets growled as he drove. "These city boys may spoil all the evidence."

Highpockets skidded his car to a stop beside the other police cars. Screeching sirens far down the boulevard told of the rapid approach of the others. Highpockets jumped out, and Lizard crawled out to stand directly behind him.

The broad veranda of the clubhouse was alive with men and women in evening dress, club employees, and members of the homicide squad. Some of the women were screaming and others talking in high-pitched voices. The men were all trying to talk at once.

A stentorian voice—Highpockets recognized it as belonging to Detective Sergeant Tim O'Toole—was

ordering everybody to get back inside. Highpockets ran to the steps, ascended to the veranda, and touched O'Toole on the arm.

"I'm here," Highpockets said.

"I suppose that's all that is necessary," the sergeant told him, not without sarcasm.

"Who got killed?"

"Gregory Bailen, one of the wealthy Bailen brothers."

"How?"

"Stabbed."

"Dang me if I don't hate a knifer! Who did it?"

"If we knew that," said Tim O'Toole, "we could be starting home."

"Well, let's find out," Highpockets suggested.

The guests and employees of the club had been herded back into the main rooms. The slaying had occurred in the ballroom, during the club's regular monthly dinner dance. Some of the guests had remained there.

With an excited club manager on one side of him and Highpockets on the other, O'Toole went to the ballroom. Lizard kept close behind Highpockets.

The body of Gregory Bailen lay on one side of the dance floor within a few feet of the row of tables. He was face downward, and the hilt of a knife protruded from his back. His legs and arms were sprawled, after the manner of a man who is dead when he drops.

Some of the orchestra had remained on the platform. At one of the tables a short distance away were two men and two women. One of the women was whimpering; the other was stony-faced. The men were puffing nervously at cigarettes.

O'Toole glanced around the room.

"At that table—they're the people who were with Gregory Bailen.

It was his party, the manager tells me. One of the men—the one this way—is Homer Bailen, the dead man's brother. He's twenty-eight; the dead man was thirty. The other man at the table is Lew Clode, a real-estate operator."

"How about the ladies?" Highpockets asked.

"That little blonde is Mary Royce, supposed to have been engaged to marry the victim. The other—that willowy brunette—is Zelma Watteau. Don't know much about her except that she's visiting here from New York and playing the society game. Probably looking for a rich husband."

The doctor approached.

"Knife driven into the back," he reported. "Got him in the heart. Hard blow; did for him instantly. Your fingerprint man's got the knife, and he's lucky for once. It's got a hilt that ought to take prints easily."

O'Toole beckoned the club manager, and that worried official hurried to him.

"Tell me about it," O'Toole said.

"It happened during our moonlight rhapsody," the manager explained.

"What's that?"

"It's a pet stunt we have. Don Murchen, our orchestra leader, arranged it. All the lights are turned off except a faint moonlight glow. The orchestra plays broken music. By that I mean they break up the piece. They start with a waltz, change to a tango, change again to a rhumba, maybe swing into an old-fashioned fox trot. Get the idea? The dancers don't know what is coming next, and they change their steps as the music changes. It gets faster and faster, and funnier and funnier. Added to that, it's a tag dance."

"How's that?" Highpockets asked.

"A man taps another on the shoulder and takes his partner. Maybe another tags him and takes her away before he's danced a dozen steps with her. Adds to the fun and confusion."

"Confusion's right," O'Toole said. "So everybody gets mixed up in the fake moonlight, and can't remember afterward exactly what happened. A fine chance for a murderer! Go ahead with the yarn."

"The dance ended, and the lights came on," the manager said. "Some woman screamed. There lay Gregory Bailen—as you see him now."

"And where were you?" O'Toole asked.

"I was over by the entrance to the lounging room. I'd looked in to watch the fun, though you can't see much in that fake moonlight."

"You're George Lannick, aren't you?"

"Yes. Been manager here for seven years."

"Then, you tell me something. I want the low-down on some of these people. The manager of a club like this for seven years has had a chance to size up folks pretty well. What about Gregory Bailen?"

"A perfect gentleman, and I mean that sincerely. Quiet, orderly, refined," Lannick declared. "He was engaged to marry Miss Mary Royce, the little blonde at the table."

"She doesn't seem to be takin' this extra hard," Highpockets observed.

"Calm outside—social veneer," Lannick replied. "She may be grieving enough inwardly."

"Know much about her?" O'Toole asked.

"Perfect lady. Never heard a hint of scandal about her," Lannick said. "Always conducts herself properly here. Seems to be well liked."

"How about Homer Bailen?"

"Not at all like his brother," Lannick

said, lowering his voice. "Inclined to have affairs with women, and all that sort of thing. Drinks a lot at times."

"Both rich, huh?"

"According to report, they both have plenty. Their father split a big fortune between them."

"How about this Lew Clode?" O'Toole asked.

"Same sort of character as Homer Bailen. He's a few years older. I don't like to say anything——"

"Say it!" O'Toole interrupted.

"Well, you hear whispers around a place like this. People get careless in their talk. It's being said that Homer Bailen and Lew Clode are both crazy about that Zelma Watteau, and that even Gregory Bailen has been looking her over a little. And that little Mary Royce—I heard a powder-room maid say—jumped all over Gregory the other evening because he'd been out on the veranda with the Watteau number."

"I thought it'd be something like that," O'Toole said. "Men in dress suits seem to get their women mixed up the same as other gents. How many guests in this room when the killing occurred?"

"About a hundred."

"And sixteen in the orchestra, not counting the leader, and waiters and bus boys hanging around. Any of them could have driven that knife into Gregory Bailen's back during the moonlight dance. This," O'Toole said, "is going to be a job."

"Let's hit the trail," Highpockets urged.

"Highpockets, I'm eager to see how you do it down in the cactus belt," Sergeant O'Toole replied. "You go at this thing your own way."

"Sure!" Highpockets said. "I don't mind cleanin' up this mess for you, O'Toole."

CHAPTER III.

RIVALS ACCUSE.

THE exits were being guarded closely so nobody could get out. Guests and employees were being checked to learn if any one had departed before the coming of the police. Screens had been put around the body of Gregory Bailen. White faces peered in at doors and windows.

The fingerprint man, having finished his work, came up and spoke to O'Toole:

"Knife hilt clean. Not a trace of a print."

"That shows," Highpockets said, "that the killin' was planned in advance. The killer was right careful not to leave his prints."

"Probably wore gloves," O'Toole said.

"Yeah, or handled the knife with a handkerchief—or a napkin," Highpockets added. "See that napkin on the floor a few feet from the body? Of course, it might have been brushed off a table by somebody dancin', and again it might not have been."

"I see it," O'Toole said grimly.

"Ask the manager at which table these folks were sittin'."

Lannick indicated the table, and Highpockets strolled over to it with the others, and examined it swiftly. Crumpled napkins were at all the five plates—except one.

"So maybe the murderer picked up a napkin and used it to handle the knife," Highpockets suggested. "Question is—did he use his own napkin? Or, did he use another and try to throw blame on somebody? Did he pick up a certain napkin deliberately, or grab the nearest? And whose napkin is that out there on the floor near the body?"

"I'll soon know that," O'Toole

said. "It'll be easy to find how they were sitting at the table."

"Folks do a lot of lyin' at a time like this," Highpockets said. "I've often noticed that there's somethin' about a killin' that makes some folks lie powerful. Don't ask whose napkin it is. Lizard can find out."

"Lizard? How?" O'Toole asked.

"Just a second. I'm interested in the knife right now."

"Here it is, Highpockets," the fingerprint man said. "A fancy curio knife, common pattern. I've seen them in gift-shop windows. Probably a thousand of them in town. Hard to trace ownership."

"Then we won't waste time tryin' it," Highpockets decided. "Never let the trail get cold when you're runnin' down a killer. Don't give'm much time to think. Question now is—who was dancin' with this Gregory Bailen when he was killed?"

"Let's find out," O'Toole said.

"Wait a second. Clever folks fix up lies real quick, and those people have had a lot of time to do it. Let's shock the truth out of'm. Make'm think there's funny goin's on, and get'm worried. You back up the play, sergeant. Lizard!"

Lizard scurried up beside him. Highpockets talked swiftly, pouring out a torrent of jargon the others could not understand, and Lizard grunted.

"Talkin' Navajo," Highpockets explained to the others. "I can speak it better'n a tribesman. Was givin' Lizard orders."

Those in the ballroom were watching closely. They saw the Navajo kneel beside the dead man and lift one of his hands. He held the hand to his nostrils and inhaled and exhaled several times. He did the same with the other hand, then got up, and grunted something to Highpockets.

"Come on," Highpockets said to the others.

With Lizard in the lead, they went straight toward the table where the two men and two women who had been guests of Gregory Bailen were sitting.

The four looked up wonderingly. The two women were nervous. Lew Clode was chewing at an unlighted cigar now, and Homer Bailen seemed to be a man afraid. Plainly, all four were fighting to retain composure.

"Folks, there's been a killin' here, as you know," Highpockets told them. "We're aimin' to find the killer, and any help will be appreciated. Sit still, and you won't be hurt. The Injun wants to do a little work."

Lizard went behind Mary Royce's chair. He bent toward her until his nose almost touched her, and moved his head back and forth rapidly, sniffing at her bare back, her upper arms, the edge of her gown.

"What sort of foolery——" Lew Clode began.

"'Tain't foolery," Highpockets said. "Just be quiet, mister. Lizard has to do his work. We want to find out somethin'."

Mary Royce shivered and drew away, looking over her shoulder at the Navajo fearfully. But, as she would have sprung to her feet, Lizard left her and went on to Zelma Watteau. She turned on him like a tigress.

"Get away from me, you—you wretch!" she cried. "What does this mean?"

"Just take it easy, ma'am," Highpockets said. "Lizard's only carryin' out my orders, and he ain't tryin' to be offensive. He wants to see what kind of perfumed powder you use, maybe."

"This ridiculous——" Lew Clode began.

"'Tain't ridiculous just 'cause it's somethin' you never run across before," Highpockets interrupted. "You keep quiet. You're mixed up in a killin' and——"

"I protest!" Homer Bailen cried. "Sergeant O'Toole, if this man is under your command, send him away. I can't stand this foolery. It's my brother out there on the floor dead, murdered!"

"If you're a right kind of brother, you'll want to see us catch the killer, won't you?" Highpockets snapped at him.

Lizard sniffed at Zelma Watteau's back and arms when he got a chance, then jabbered something at Highpockets.

"So!" Highpockets said, facing the brunette. "You were dancin' with the man when he was stabbed."

"Why, yes," she admitted. "But how did you know?"

"Lizard just told me. He's a human bloodhound, Lizard is. I'd give a lot to have his nose. It's a warm night, and everybody's hands warm and perspirin' more or less. The man who was dancin' with you left the scent of his palm against your back, I reckon. Lizard got the scent from the dead man's hand and found it on you. Nothin' very remarkable in that."

Zelma Watteau shuddered.

"You can almost feel his hand pressin' against your back yet, huh?" Highpockets asked. "And now he's dead."

"Stop it!" she screeched. "I can't stand it!"

"Tell me about it, huh?"

"I started dancing the moonlight rhapsody with Mr. Clode," she said. "Another man cut in. Then he was tagged by Mr. Homer Bailen. We danced for a time, and Gregory cut in. The music grew faster, and we were all laughing. The lights were

very dim. Suddenly, he let go of me, and somebody bumped against me, and I lost him. I was laughing about it, trying to get off the floor. Then the lights came on, and——" She shuddered again.

"I reckon he let go of you when that knife was driven into his back," Highpockets said, "and just slumped over and sprawled on the floor there by the table. Almost died in your arms, a man might say."

"Stop it!" she cried.

"Go easy, Highpockets," O'Toole gave whispered warning.

"I'm only tryin' to get at facts. We know who he was dancin' with when he was stabbed, and that's somethin'. Miss Watteau, while you were dancin' with him, were you out in the middle of the floor or near the tables?"

"Most of the time we were dancing along that row of tables," she replied.

"You don't remember pickin' a napkin up off one of the tables?"

"A napkin? Why, no. Why should I do such a thing while dancing?"

"Whoever killed Gregory Bailen held the knife with a napkin, so no fingerprints would be left. There's the napkin over by the body."

"Whoever killed—— What are you trying to say? That—that I had something to do with this terrible thing?"

"Oh, I ain't doubtin' but what you're concerned in it," Highpockets replied, frankly. "When we get around to it, we'll soon find out who held that napkin. Scent ought to be strong on it. A person about to kill another—his nerves are all keyed up, his mind's twisted, his heart's pumpin' powerful, and for some reason he perspires a powerful lot in his hands. He handled that napkin—or she, as the case may be—and

it won't take Lizard long to find out who did it."

"What do you mean by saying I was concerned in it?" Zelma Watteau cried. "Are you accusing me of murdering a man I much admired? Why should I do such a thing? We were good friends."

"Aw, shucks!" Highpockets said. "In a case like this here, everything's got to come out so we can get at the truth. This here is a Class-A homicide, or I'd get real tough. You listen to me, ma'am. You're a beauty, and you've sure got fire. You've turned many a man's head, I reckon. You remind me of a little *cantina* girl I saw down on the Border once. Same spirit."

"How dare you! Comparing me to—to——"

"This here *cantina* girl—she always carried a dagger under her garter, and one night she used it. You see, it was like this: two or three men were crazy about her, and she didn't care at all for'm."

"I'm quite sure we're not interested," Lew Clode said coldly.

Highpockets silenced him with a look, and continued:

"She was crazy about a quiet feller who was engaged to marry another girl, and he didn't want any truck with her. She tried her best to get him, and when she found she couldn't, she used the knife on'm, and while she was dancin' with him, too."

"I refuse to listen to any more of this—this——" Zelma Watteau began.

"And you don't have to, Zelma," Lew Clode said. "This is preposterous! None of us will say another word until I've had a chance to talk to my attorney."

"Is he here?" Highpockets asked. "He's not. But I'll phone."

"He ain't here, so you can't talk

to him, and you ain't goin' to phone just now," Highpockets said. "You know, mister, I'm commencin' to dislike you. When I'm trailin' a killer and anybody tries to interfere with me, I always dislike'm, and sometimes I dislike'm violent."

Mary Royce had got to her feet, and stood gripping the edge of the table, a little blond beauty whose eyes flashed and whose body quivered with rage.

"That's it!" she cried. "Gregory was engaged to me. And this woman has tried everything to win him from me. She almost turned his head. Gregory and I—almost quarreled about her. When she found she couldn't get him——"

"Couldn't get him?" Zelma Watteau interrupted. "I could have had him within a week. He'd have thrown you over for me. You knew you were losing him. And you couldn't stand a blow like that to your pride. Better to have him die while he was still engaged to you, so you'd have a lot of sympathy. Better to kill him!" She whirled toward Highpockets. "Why don't you question her a while? Why don't you ask her with whom she was dancing when Gregory was killed?"

"That's fair enough," Highpockets said. "How about it, Miss Royce?"

"I—I wasn't dancing at all," she confessed. "I started to dance the rhapsody with Gregory, and somebody cut in. I waited for him to claim me again, but he didn't. I thought maybe he was trying to find Zelma. I couldn't stand it. I excused myself and started to go to the veranda. I was almost to the door when the lights came on and somebody screamed."

"Meet anybody you knew as you were leavin' the dance floor?" Highpockets asked.

"Yes. I bumped into Don Mur-

chen, the orchestra leader, by the corner table. He'll probably remember. There he is at that little table by the orchestra stand. It was just a few seconds before the lights came on."

"And a few seconds after Gregory had been killed," Zelma Watteau added, "you were hurrying from the room!"

CHAPTER IV. BAND LEADER.

DOWN home in Arizona a killer generally was known, and Highpockets's job had been running the criminal down. Here, it was different. Here, it had to be ascertained who had done the killing before the running down began. Highpockets was a man trained for direct action. It was not his nature to ask a lot of questions and get at the truth in that way. You could learn more by simply watching folks, he often had said.

He had been watching these closely, estimating them. He was a keen judge of human nature.

Mary Royce had been in love with Gregory Bailen, he decided, and had expected to marry him. A quiet little woman like that, her love spurned, could turn into a tigress and kill, then revert to her quiet little self and try to defend herself from the consequences with the idea that the victim had deserved his fate.

Zelma Watteau was a type Highpockets understood well. She had her beauty on the market. Undoubtedly, she had started playing Homer Bailen against Lew Clode, thinking to marry one of them, whereas they may have had different ideas about it. Then Gregory Bailen had caught her fancy. She became infatuated with the quiet, dignified man so un-

like the others. That he was already engaged deterred her not at all. Highpockets judged that Gregory Bailen had come to his senses and repulsed her. And she was the type to kill in an angry rage.

Then, there was Lew Clode. He had an unsavory reputation. Undoubtedly, he was infatuated with the striking brunette. Perhaps he knew how she considered Gregory Bailen, and was not averse to removing a rival.

Homer Bailen? Highpockets considered him, too. More than any of the others, he was betraying emotion. His face was white, his eyes glared, his hands trembled. He looked like a man desperately afraid. Had he slain his brother over this dark woman who so attracted men?

Highpockets growled something the others could not understand, and turned away from the table deliberately, whispering to O'Toole to have the four stay there, and to let that napkin remain where it was on the floor, untouched.

Highpockets strode toward the orchestra stand, Lizard at his heels. O'Toole followed as soon as he had given instructions to some of the squad men. Highpockets stopped in front of a small table at which Don Murchen, the orchestra leader, was sitting.

"Do you remember Miss Royce bumpin' into you just before the lights came on?" Highpockets asked.

"Why, yes, I do," Don Murchen replied.

"And how was she actin'?"

"I didn't notice particularly. She seemed to be in a hurry."

"Where'd you run into her?"

Don Murchen pointed to a spot near the end of the row of tables. It was about twenty feet from the corner of the orchestra stand.

"And what were you doin' over

there, with your orchestra playin'?" Highpockets demanded. "Don't you have to lead'm?"

"We rehearse the rhapsody beforehand," Don Murchen replied. "I don't have to lead the boys. A few mistakes wouldn't make any difference, with everybody laughing and cutting up. I leave my stand sometimes and go down on the floor. Sometimes, I even cut in and dance a few steps. Just a habit."

"Did you cut in and dance a few steps to-night?" Highpockets wanted to know.

"Yes."

"With what woman?"

"Oh, I don't quite remember. I danced a few steps with some fat, middle-aged dame. They like that, you know, and it makes a band leader popular and is good for business. Then I cut in on—I think it was Miss Zelma Watteau, that stunning brunette you were talking to a few minutes ago."

"You think? Wouldn't you be sure, dancin' with a flashy señorita like that? I'd think a man'd remember it."

"Oh, I've danced with her before," Murchen replied. "We've got to be great friends since she's been here."

"You have, huh? You fall for her, too?"

The orchestra leader muttered something and glanced across the room. Highpockets decided he did not like this Don Murchen. He was the oily-haired, slick-mannered type that always aroused Highpockets's suspicion.

"Tell me about it," Highpockets demanded.

"Oh, she—she flirted with me a bit, but I'm used to women doing that. It's part of the racket."

"Where were you when the lights went up?"

"At the corner of the orchestra

stand. I knew the number was almost over. When they found that man dead, I told the boys to remain in their places until the police came."

"You didn't happen to pick up a napkin while you were dancin'?"

"Napkin? Why—why, no!" Don Murchen stammered. "A napkin—while dancing? That's funny."

"Maybe not," Highpockets said. "You hear a lot of gossip around here, maybe. What about this Watteau girl and her men friends?"

"She was after rich game," Murchen replied, instantly. "She was playing Homer Bailen against Lew Clode; everybody saw that. I think she fell like a ton of rock for Gregory Bailen, but he wouldn't have anything to do with her. So it was his brother or Clode, if she wanted to marry money."

"And which horse was nosin' out in the runnin'?"

Murchen hesitated. "I—I think she was about ready to make the deal with Homer Bailen. I'm just guessing at it, you understand. But once I overheard this Gregory talking to his brother, and telling him Zelma Watteau wasn't the sort of girl he should marry—family pride and all that. Homer got sore about it!"

"So?" Highpockets said.

"But I think Homer was going right ahead and buy her—for that's what it'd have amounted to. He was sure sore at his brother for trying to break them up."

"And Clode just stood back and took——"

"Not much, he didn't! Lew Clode had the idea that Gregory Bailen was getting wild about her, and was ready to throw over that Royce girl. I overheard Clode telling Gregory Bailen one afternoon in the cocktail lounge that he had one girl already, and that was enough."

"So you think she was fixin' to marry Homer Bailen because she couldn't get Gregory, huh?"

"Oh, I don't know! I don't want to get mixed up in this. I've got my professional reputation to——"

"Uh-huh," interrupted Highpockets. "Be a shame to put a stain on that, I reckon. Just between ourselves, now, man to man, let's get at this. About killin' this man; who d'you think had a motive?"

"I'm not a detective. I suppose either of the girls, because of jealousy; or either of the men if they thought Gregory Bailen was about to take Zelma Watteau away from them."

"You know somethin'?" Highpockets asked. "You might be crazy enough about this Watteau girl yourself to knife the man you thought she was fallin' for."

"What? How dare you——"

"You look to me like the knifin' kind," Highpockets informed him. "I'll be wantin' to see you later, so don't go away."

He left Don Murchen gulping, and turned aside with Lizard and O'Toole.

"What kind of a play are you making, Highpockets?" the sergeant asked. "I don't get it."

"Askin' a lot of questions is a poor way of catchin' a killer," Highpockets replied. "But it does do one thing: it gets folks to thinkin' and talkin'. Then a man can stand back and wait, and let'm talk themselves into trouble."

"What you think about it, Highpockets? We've got to do something. The D. A. will be sending his own squad out and bothering us if we don't settle it quick. And the newspaper boys are on their way here."

"We've got four suspects—all of'm weak," Highpockets replied. "The

battle of them two women over Gregory Bailen hadn't come to a crisis. If either of 'm had wanted to kill him—well, it wasn't time yet. Same with the two men."

"So what?"

"A spectacular killin' like that—motive's too weak. And any of those four could have pulled it off somewhere else with less chance of bein' caught. Somebody packed that knife to the club. Somebody planned this who knew all about that moonlight rhapsody thing."

"That's the way it looks to me, Highpockets."

"So what? As you just said. Outside those four, who'd want to kill Gregory Bailen?"

"He hadn't an enemy in the world, far as I know."

"Let's see, now. That Watteau girl was dancin' with Lew Clode. Then Homer Bailen cut in, and then Gregory. That left both Clode and Homer Bailen loose to go to work with the knife. And the Royce girl admits she wasn't dancin', so she could have done it. And Zelma Watteau could have done it while she was dancin' with him." Highpockets was muttering all this to himself rather than talking to O'Toole.

"Where'd the knife come from?" O'Toole asked.

"A man could have carried it in his pocket, or either of the women in a garter or hand bag."

"Most women don't wear those kind of garters with dance gowns nowadays," O'Toole said.

"I wouldn't know," Highpockets replied modestly.

"But, they carry evening bags stuffed with lipstick and powder and such. Did you notice the bags these girls have? Either is big enough to hold a knife like that."

"Yeah," Highpockets agreed.

"O'Toole, I reckon these folks have had time enough to get nervous. So maybe we'd better examine that napkin now."

CHAPTER V.

ANOTHER VICTIM.

HIGHPOCKETS jabbered at Lizard for quite some time, and the Navajo shuffled over to the napkin and picked it up by one corner. George Lannick, the club manager, approached the group.

"I've been looking at that table," he whispered. "That napkin came from Mr. Lew Clode's plate, I'm sure. Anyway, he was sitting in the place where there's no napkin beside the plate now."

"Thanks," Highpockets said. "We'll find out in a minute. By the way, did you ever know of any trouble between Gregory Bailen and your orchestra leader?"

"Why, no," Lannick replied. "I doubt if they ever spoke to each other."

"I thought maybe Gregory Bailen was a club officer or something like that, and maybe had kicked about Murchen's music. Them band leaders are right sensitive, I've heard."

"Gregory Bailen was a member, nothing more," Lannick replied. "But Homer Bailen is the club president and head of the board of managers."

"How about Lew Clode?"

"A member of one of the lesser committees, that's all."

Highpockets waved the manager aside, and Lannick drifted back toward the wall. Highpockets turned to watch Lizard. The Navajo had taken the napkin to a bare serving table and spread it there, and was sniffing at it. He said something to

Highpockets, who replied, and sniffed again.

"Two scents on that napkin, he says," Highpockets reported to O'Toole. "That means one's the scent of the person who used it at the table, and the other the murderer."

He beckoned Lizard, and they went back to the table where the four were sitting.

"What foolishness now?" Lew Clode asked. "Sergeant O'Toole, I demand the right to telephone my attorney. I'll sue the city!"

"Shucks! If you sue the city 'cause of anything I do, and get judgment, I'll pay the bill," Highpockets broke in. "When I'm after a killer, I don't let nothin' stop me. If this here wasn't a Class-A killin', I'd maybe get rough. Lizard wants to smell all your hands."

"This infernal nonsense——" Clode blustered.

"There's two scents on that napkin," Highpockets said. "One's probably that of the person who used the napkin at the table, and whoever it was needn't be scared any. 'Cause it's the second scent probably belongs to the murderer."

Highpockets and O'Toole watched closely while Lizard went first to Mary Royce and sniffed at her hands. He shook his head, and the girl sighed with relief. He went to Zelma Watteau next, and she surrendered a hand to him willingly. Lizard sniffed and passed on.

Homer Bailen was shuddering as he extended his hand. Lizard sniffed it and went on to Clode, who held out his hand rather ungraciously. Lizard sniffed, then stepped back, lifted his head, and gave Highpockets a lengthy report in Navajo.

"Mr. Clode, your scent's on that napkin," Highpockets said. "Ain't surprised, 'cause the manager said

he thought that was the napkin you'd used at the table. And the other scent—the stronger one—well, ladies and gentlemen, it doesn't match up with any of you."

"Thank heavens!" Mary Royce said.

"So what?" O'Toole asked.

"So somebody else killed Gregory Bailen. I reckon we've got to find somebody with a motive."

"Wait!" Homer Bailen bent across the table, shaking with fear, his face ashen. "I—I think there was a mistake. I think the murderer meant to get me, and got Gregory."

"What makes you think so?" Highpockets snapped at him.

"I've received threats. One by telephone only yesterday, some man with a deep voice. He said, 'If you cause anybody any trouble, I'll kill you!'"

"What'd that mean?"

"I don't know," Homer Bailen said, "I haven't caused anybody any trouble."

"Have you got a big business deal on? Anything like that?"

"I'm not much of a business man. The business of the estate is handled by attorneys," Homer Bailen explained. "The biggest piece of actual business I have is being president of the country club, and you'd not call that much. I examine the books now and then. Due to start in on them in a few days."

"Who'd threatened you, then, and why?"

"I don't know. But I was threatened. It just occurred to me that I was dancing with Zelma, and Gregory tagged me and was killed immediately afterward. Somebody may have been waiting to stab me, saw me dancing with Zelma—you could pick out her gown from others because those ornaments on it glitter in the light—and didn't notice her

change of partners, so struck Gregory thinking he was I. We're about the same size, and in the faint light you——"

"But who'd want to kill you?" Highpockets persisted. "I think we'd better——"

His sentence ended in a gasp. The lights had gone out.

The building was plunged into darkness, and the lights on the veranda and along the driveway in front were extinguished, so the master switch for the establishment must have been thrown, or a fuse had blown out, and there had been no evidence of the latter.

In the big ballroom, there were only faint streaks of moonlight which came through two windows, one striking directly across the table at which the four were sitting.

"Everybody stay put!" O'Toole howled. "Men, guard the exits! Let nobody out! Flashlights!"

Before the squad men in the ballroom could get out their flashlights, amber flame lanced the gloom. A gun barked three times. The flashes revealed that the gun was being fired from near the hall doorway.

A cry of pain rang through the room. There was the sound of running feet. The officers were afraid to fire, lest they hit somebody not concerned.

Flashlights flamed, and shot their beams across the room in a dozen directions. In the other rooms, women were screaming and men howling. They could hear the nasal voice of Lannick, the manager, as he called to employees out in the hall.

Then the lights flashed on again.

Homer Bailen was slumped over the table, blood running from a wound in his shoulder. The two women screamed. Highpockets darted to Bailen's side and lifted his

head. Bailen's eyes were open, and his lips twitched.

"I—was right," Homer Bailen muttered. "It was I—he was after."

Then, Highpockets and O'Toole both saw that Homer Bailen had been struck twice. One bullet had hit him in the shoulder, but the other had penetrated his breast.

At the hall door, a member of the squad shouted and pointed. A revolver was on the floor.

"Get that gun!" O'Toole barked at the fingerprint man. "Go to work on it, though probably it won't do any good. Pass word outside to seal the place! Nobody in or out! This, right under our noses! Doctor, get here! Clode, take the ladies into the lounging room and stay there with them. It's a cinch none of you three did this."

Detective Tim O'Toole was the efficient officer. He was also angry. He whirled toward Lannick as the manager came hurrying into the room.

"What happened?" he barked.

"Somebody threw the master switch," Lannick reported. "It is out in the main hallway. I thought of that when there was no indication of a fuse blowing out. I ran there and threw it back and put the lights on again."

"See anybody?" O'Toole asked.

"It was dark. I think I heard somebody running down the hallway. That was after the shooting."

"Where were you when the lights went out?"

"I'd just stepped into my office. This is terrible! Both the Bailen brothers! Can't you officers do something?"

"We'll do plenty," O'Toole promised.

And then Highpockets touched O'Toole on the shoulder and pointed

to the serving table were the napkin had been spread by Lizard.

The napkin was gone.

CHAPTER VI. ONE CONFESSION.



HE ballroom was cleared of all except squad men. The doctor made a swift examination. Homer Bailen was pronounced dead.

The fingerprint man reported almost immediately that no prints were on the gun found on the floor. It was an old model revolver of heavy caliber, and the serial number had been destroyed.

Highpockets and O'Toole sat at one of the tables. Lizard approached them. He talked swiftly in Navajo, and Highpockets betrayed excitement.

"The third shot went past Lizard's head," he said to O'Toole. "Somebody wanted to get Lizard and the evidence of his nose out of the way, I reckon. He says he remembers the smell, though."

"More than a hundred people scattered through the building and on the veranda, and any one of them could have fired those shots," O'Toole said.

"Somebody knew enough to turn off the lights—must have known where the switch box was located. Good shootin', too, with only that streak of moonlight on the table. And don't talk about any 'one,' O'Toole. Make it any 'two.' The same man who fired those shots couldn't have got the napkin. The table where the napkin was spread is thirty feet from that door. He wouldn't have had time to shoot, reach the table and get the napkin and escape, before we were usin' flashlights. I heard feet patterin'

over by that table before the echo of the last shot died out."

"Two of them," O'Toole mused.

"Two in the deal. We've been ridin' down the wrong trail, seems like," Highpockets declared. "Now, what two persons'd want Homer Bailen removed—acceptin' for the moment that killin' his brother was a mistake?"

"If this was down in cactus land, Highpockets, and you had full charge, what'd you do?"

Highpockets grinned. "But this here is one of these Class-A homicides, and a man's got to use caution," he replied.

"I'm in charge here, Highpockets, and I'm ordering you to forget the book. Call it a couple of killings, and do your work."

"That," Highpockets said, "is all I wanted to hear. Lizard!"

He sprang to his feet and jabbered Navajo at Lizard in a rushing stream. His eyes darted around the room as he spoke. They caught sight of Don Murchen slipping through a door at the side of the orchestra stand.

"Here! Where've you been?" Highpockets snapped.

"I went to the wash room for a moment. I was there when the lights went out. What's happened?"

"Just another killin'," Highpockets said. He pointed to where the doctor and his assistants were preparing to have the bodies removed, and strode straight on to Don Murchen and grasped his arm.

"Here——" the band leader began.

Lizard seized the man's hands and bent over them. He spoke rapidly to Highpockets.

"So you washed your hands, huh?"

"Why—why, yes. What of it?" Murchen asked.

"In a hurry, too. Didn't take time to dry'm right."

"The lights went out, and the shooting—I wanted to hurry back and find out what'd happened."

"Get your hands up!" Highpockets ordered.

Highpockets searched him swiftly, while Murchen grumbled about the indignity of it, but found nothing incriminating. Lizard sniffed at the outturned pockets of the band leader, and jabbered at Highpockets again. Highpockets grabbed Don Murchen and slammed him down into a chair.

"You do some talkin', pronto!" he snapped. "What'd you do with that napkin?"

"Wh-what napkin?"

"The one the killer used. The one somebody took off that service table while the lights were out and the shootin' goin' on."

"Why, I—I don't know——"

"Don't lie to me!" Highpockets barked. "You grabbed it and stuffed it into your hip pocket. You got rid of it while you were out of this room. You washed your hands to kill any possible scent, but you didn't wash your pocket. Lizard got the scent there."

"You're crazy! I never touched the napkin."

"You goin' to keep lyin' to me?" Highpockets roared. He slapped Don Murchen so hard that his head rocked.

"Easy, Highpockets," O'Toole urged.

"Easy, nothin'! I'm havin' my own way now. No Class-A stuff about this. Mr. Don Murchen, you better do some talkin'!"

"You're wrong! I'll not say a word. You can beat me up, but I'll not talk!"

"You grabbed that napkin while the shootin' was goin' on," Highpockets accused. "You knew that shootin' was due and watched for it. Quick work! So you know who did

the shootin'. Where's that manager?"

"Lannick!" O'Toole called.

Lannick came hurrying to them.

"You got a little private room back here off this hall somewhere?" Highpockets asked.

"There's a small room just opposite the door."

"Good enough! We're goin' to take you there, Mr. Don Murchen—just me and Mr. O'Toole and Lizard. And you're goin' to talk. Oh, we won't beat you up! We'll just let Lizard get to work on you. He's got ways, this here son of the sage. You'll talk, all right!"

He jerked the struggling Murchen across the room, and they followed Lannick to the door and across the hall to the small room there. Lannick, white of face and trembling, turned on the lights, and Highpockets hurled Don Murchen into a chair.

"You—Lannick!" Highpockets said. "Don't tell anybody where we are or what we're doin'. Go on about your business!"

Highpockets closed the door in the manager's face. O'Toole stood beside it. Highpockets strode across the room and stood in front of Murchen.

"I hate a killer," he said. "I've spent my life runnin' down killers. I'm trailin' one now, and nobody's goin' to keep me from gettin' him by refusin' to talk. You got that napkin, didn't you?"

"I never touched it," Murchen declared.

"I'd rather believe Lizard. Did you think you were savin' a pal when you got away with that napkin?"

"I tell you——"

"You can't lie to me and get away with it, you hair-oil ad," Highpockets told him. "I know your kind—smirkin' and smilin' and preyin' on foolish women."

"You've no right to talk like that!"

"Told me you'd flirted a little with that Zelma Watteau."

"Oh, I did. The women expect it—some of them. But that's all."

"Here's a watch I got out of your vest pocket when I was searchin' you out there. Mighty fine pocket watch, this is. I bought one some-thin' like it for a friend back home, after I came into money. Costs a hundred."

Don Murchen paled, and began licking at his lips as though they suddenly were parched.

"Ha! Know what I'm gettin' at, do you? Here in the back, engraved:

"To my darling, Don, from Zelma!

"Just a little flirtation, huh? A hundred-dollar watch, with that engravin'."

"Oh, it—it was just a gesture! She's the kind of girl to do things like that," Murchen said. "I'd been havin' the boys play her pet tunes whenever she came to the club."

"Wait!" Highpockets snapped. "You boys watch him."

He jerked open the door. Lannick, the manager, was in the hall only a few feet away.

"This here—it's private," Highpockets snapped. "You keep farther away!"

He hurried on down the hall, through the lobby, and to the lounging room. Glancing around, he saw Zelma Watteau, and beckoned her. Clode came with her to the door.

"I'm wantin' to speak to Miss Watteau a minute, alone," Highpockets said. "You keep the other girl company, Clode."

Highpockets led the girl through the lobby and down the hall away from the curious. A few glances told him the guests were getting nervous and wanted to get away, and

that the police and squad men were guarding the exits.

Highpockets stopped a few feet from the door of the room where Don Murchen was being held prisoner, and motioned Zelma Watteau to a chair.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Somethin's happened. I want to ask you a question, and I want you to tell me the truth. Might save yourself a lot of trouble by doin' it. Were you really in love with Gregory Bailen?"

"Yes, I loved Gregory Bailen," she said. "That's funny, coming from me. I'd decided there was nothing in that love stuff, and was determined to marry money. I was trying to decide between Homer Bailen and Lew Clode. And Gregory—well, he was so different. But he loved Mary Royce and was to marry her. I loved him, though I'd have married one of the others to get security for myself. I didn't kill him, if that's what you mean."

"Ever been married before?" Highpockets asked.

She looked at him swiftly. "What made you ask that?"

"The way you spoke about love—like a woman who'd been in love once, and maybe had got married, and it hadn't worked out well."

"I—I'm married now," she said, in a low voice. "I was intending to go to Reno quietly, and get a divorce, when I was sure I could land either Homer Bailen or Lew Clode. It was a few years ago in the East. We kept it secret. And it—smashed."

"Hard luck," Highpockets said. "And since then you've been playin' butterfly, huh? Maybe imaginin' yourself in love with man after man."

"No!" she cut him short. "I thought I loved the boy I married,

but I didn't. And he's the only one I ever thought I loved, until I met Gregory Bailen."

"You ain't one of these flighty janes who run around callin' everybody 'dearie' and 'darlin',' are you?"

"I think it's disgusting."

"Yeah? But you called this Don Murchen, the band leader, your darlin', didn't you? Gave him a watch with that little sentiment engraved in it, didn't you? I've seen the watch, Miss Watteau, or whatever your name is. I know somethin' about watches. I happen to know that that particular model hasn't been made for four or five years, 'cause I bought one at a reduction on account of that. Better'n the ones they're makin' now. So you were Don Murchen's 'darlin'' a few years ago, huh?"

"You seem to have found out a lot," she said.

"He told me he'd just had a little flirtation with you. Tryin' to protect you, I reckon. Maybe you'd like to tell me the rights of it."

"It's soon told," she said. "Don Murchen is my husband."

CHAPTER VII.

ANOTHER CONFESSION.

SHE hesitated a moment, then went on: "It was four years ago, when he had his orchestra in the East. I thought I was in love with him, and married him. We kept it secret because he thought news of his marriage would hurt him professionally, and I was afraid of my family. They were wealthy and important then.

"I soon found out I didn't love him, and begged him to keep the marriage a secret. He was willing. But he was crazy about me, insanely

jealous; is yet. He kept quiet as long as I sent him money, wherever he happened to be. And he managed to see me sometimes.

"I was a fool not to tell the whole thing long ago. But the longer I held off, the harder it was. I thought I'd slip into Reno some day and get a divorce, but just kept putting it off. Then I came here to visit—and Don had his band here at the club. I couldn't avoid him.

"I told him we had to make an end of it, that I was going to marry some substantial man. He threatened me. He said he'd never let me do it. I lived in mortal terror that he'd make the news of our secret marriage public. But possibly he knew that would cut him off from the money I was always giving him.

"I thought it was only money he wanted, but he still wanted me. He's moving on to the coast with his band soon, and wanted me to go there with him. I told him I was going to Reno, and marry again. And he—he said he'd kill the man I picked out."

"He did, huh?" Highpockets asked. "And did he know which one you'd picked out?"

"I think he knew I was falling in love with Gregory Bailen. I caught him snooping around. I think he overheard a talk I had with Gregory. I was telling him I intended to marry Homer, since I couldn't have him, and he was trying to tell me I'd never be happy with Homer."

"And now you can't marry either Homer or Gregory. They're both dead, possibly because of you. And probably you won't even be able to land Lew Clode, when everything gets out. I reckon your game's played out hereabouts, Zelma Watteau. If you really loved this Gregory, and intended to marry Homer, it'd be the decent thing if you helped bring the murderer to justice."

"Yes," she said. "I owe that much to them."

"Come on," Highpockets said.

He clasped her hand and lifted her from the chair, went to the door with her and flung it open, and thrust her into the room. O'Toole quickly closed the door again.

"Murchen," Highpockets said, "I've brought your wife to see you."

O'Toole gasped.

Don Murchen's eyes gleamed. "So you found out," he said.

"Yeah, I found it out," Highpockets admitted. "I know all about it. She tells me she really loved that Gregory Bailen, and she wants to help run down his killer. She's all washed up with you, Murchen—so she says."

Don Murchen sprang to his feet, his face flaming, and Highpockets quickly slapped him down into his chair again.

"Washed up with me, is she?" Murchen raged. "I told her what'd happen, if she tried to marry somebody else. I knew she'd picked Homer Bailen. And I told her——"

"You told her you'd kill any man she picked, huh?" Highpockets interrupted. "Do some more talkin', Murchen."

"I—I'm done talking."

"Yeah? Get busy, Lizard!"

Lizard evidently had been awaiting that command. He darted across the room and bent over Don Murchen and grasped his left arm. Immediately, Murchen gave a shriek of pain and twisted half out of the chair. Lizard ripped away his collar and tore the front of his dress shirt halfway down. From his own sash, the Navajo drew a long cactus thorn. He pressed the point into Don Murchen's breast over the heart, holding the band leader back with one arm thrown across his throat.

"Listen, Murchen!" Highpockets said. "That thorn will be pushed into you a tiny fraction of an inch at a time. You'll go crazy with pain, and with waitin' for every next jab. I've seen mighty strong men wilt under that trick. It's an Injun trick. You ready to talk?"

"Wh-what do you want me to say?" Murchen panted.

Lizard relaxed pressure and, at a sign from Highpockets, stepped aside, leaving the thorn sticking into Murchen's breast, and holding his hands so he could not extract it.

"All right!" Murchen said. "I'm done, anyhow. I said I'd do it, and I did. Been more proper, maybe, if I'd killed that woman."

"So you did kill Gregory Bailen?"

"Yes, I——"

"Don!" Zelma Watteau cried the word in mingled pain and rage. She started forward, but O'Toole held her back, made her sit in a chair.

"But it was a mistake," Murchen said. "It was Homer I wanted to kill, because I knew Zelma intended marrying him. I went down on the dance floor when the rhapsody began, and went around by the tables. I had the knife in my inside pocket, and picked up Clode's napkin. I'd been watching where each of them ate. I thought maybe Clode would be blamed for the death, everybody knowing he and Homer Bailen were rivals.

"I watched and saw those ornaments glittering on Zelma's gown, and recognized her in the faint light. I watched until I saw Homer Bailen start dancing with her. It was a little time before they danced back by the tables—they'd been lost on the floor a minute. I could tell by the music that the rhapsody was almost over. Then I saw them. Zelma had

her side toward me, just turning in the dance. The man's back swung toward me, and I struck. I dropped the napkin and got away, back to the orchestra stand."

"Don—Don!" Zelma Watteau cried.

"It's your own fault," he raged at her. "I don't care what they do with me. I always was crazy about you, and being separated made me crazier. And when I thought of losing you forever to some other man just because he had money and social position—well, I'm sorry I made the mistake and killed Gregory. He was a decent sort. And the deal——"

"What deal?" Highpockets barked.

"Oh, nothing."

"Talk, or I'll start Lizard workin' again. You were in this with somebody else, I know. Did you steal that napkin when the lights were out?"

"Yes. I got it and ran to the wash room and hid it there. Meant to destroy it later. If there was a scent on it, it was mine."

"Then you didn't fire the shots that finally killed Homer Bailen—the man you wanted to kill—and that almost got Lizard," Highpockets barked at him. "Two men were in that little deal. And it was worked out so smooth that it must have been planned. Who was in it with you, Murchen, and why? Who, besides you, wanted Homer Bailen out of the way?"

"I—I've told enough," Murchen said. "I've told my own part."

"You want I should have Lizard get busy? I know your kind, Murchen. You're mighty sensitive. You can face death, maybe, but you can't stand steady pain. And that thorn—I've seen some strong men screech in agony and beg to be killed. It's an Apache trick the Navajos bor-

rowed. As the thorn goes deeper and deeper——"

"Stop! Stop!" Murchen begged.

"You want to burn for killin' Gregory and have the man who killed Homer keep walkin' around grinnin' about it?" Highpockets asked.

"Burn, burn!" Don Murchen mouthed. "The chair! I can't stand it! Waiting! Counting the days! Having them take me through the door—to the chair! Me, a well man!"

Highpockets grunted and jumped forward and slapped Lizard aside and extracted the thorn. He started to tell O'Toole to get some water. But Don Murchen began laughing. It was the laughter of a man suddenly gone insane. He threw his arms wildly, dropped back into the chair.

"Burn!" he cried. "And he—he won't! I had a reason; a good reason! He was going to have Zelma—Homer Bailen was. But the other one—his reason was only money, and fear. His crooked books—and Homer Bailen going to examine them!"

Don Murchen ceased speaking, his head fell forward, and he breathed deeply. Zelma Watteau was sobbing in the chair against the wall. Lizard stood back, inscrutable. O'Toole was muttering something.

And Highpockets was remembering that Homer Bailen had said that his only business was running the country club and examining the books once in a while, and that he was going to do it in a few days.

"O'Toole, call a couple of the men to stand guard over Murchen," Highpockets said. "And this girl, if you want her for a witness. Let's clean this business up."

O'Toole opened the door and

called the men. They entered the room to guard the pair. O'Toole, Highpockets, and Lizard went out into the hall.

Highpockets led the way at a swinging stride along the hall to the office and knocked.

"Come in!" a voice called.

They went in, and closed the door behind them.

"What can I do for you now, gentlemen?" George Lannick, the club manager, asked.

CHAPTER VIII. THE ROAD HOME.

HIGHPOCKETS strode up to the desk and looked down at it. Ledgers and cash books were strewn over it. Apparently Lannick had been doing a lot of figuring.

"Can't you make the figures come out right?" Highpockets asked, grinning.

"They're troublesome at times," Lannick replied.

"Yeah, I'll bet. Figures are funny things. Long as you play with'm accordin' to rules, they're right friendly. But when you start in jugglin', they can cause a heap of trouble. Figures have their own rules. Two and two is four, and no man can make it five."

"But what—what did you want to see me about?" Lannick asked. "Have there been any developments?"

"Plenty of'm," Highpockets replied. "Don Murchen's been doin' considerable talkin'. A right interestin' time was had in the other room. We found out that Zelma Watteau is really his wife."

"Yes?"

"You don't seem downright surprised about it."

DS—6

"Oh, Don told me that a long time ago, swearing me to secrecy," Lannick said. "I knew all about it. I saw him watching that woman trying to make up her mind which rich man to take, knew she was planning a Reno divorce."

"How come you didn't tell me all that earlier?"

"Well, I—I was afraid Don might get into trouble. You might jump to the conclusion he had something to do with the murder."

"Oh, he's confessed he killed Gregory Bailen, and told us just how he did it," Highpockets said.

Lannick sat up straight in the chair. "He did? That's terrible. Jealous, I suppose."

"He thought he was killin' Homer Bailen, the brother. He explained how he made the mistake. And later, when the lights went out and we had that shootin', he stole the napkin."

"You mean he—he killed both Gregory and Homer Bailen, too?"

"No; he didn't kill Homer. Couldn't, and get the napkin. Didn't have time to do both. You see, Lannick, another man was in the deal with him, he says. He and this other man both wanted to kill Homer Bailen. When Murchen missed the first time, the other man planned to make sure, and at the same time let Don have a chance to get that napkin that was worryin' him."

"Another man?" Lannick asked.

"Yeah. Don gave it away. Homer Bailen, as president of the club, was about to have an audit of the books. And this man was afraid of that. Got crooked accounts, I reckon, and feared goin' to jail. Homer won't audit the books now, 'cause he's dead. But they'll be audited, of course, and right away, I imagine."

"The books of the club? Why, we have a bookkeeper, but——"

"But you really handle the books," Highpockets carried on for him. "You can juggle the vouchers, maybe."

"I see." George Lannick was cool about it. He took a cigar from a humidor on the desk, lighted it, puffed. "You're trying to tell me that my books are crooked, and that I killed Homer Bailen to prevent him auditing them soon, so I'd possibly have time to cover my tracks. Is that it?"

"You tell me," said Highpockets.

"If my books were crooked, how would that prove I killed Homer Bailen? Was I seen? Are my fingerprints on the gun?"

"You knew where that master switch was. You could have turned out the lights, stepped to the door, and done the shootin', tossed the gun down, waited a minute, and turned on the lights again and come in where we were."

"Yes, that's possible," Lannick replied.

"With Don Murchen as a witness you——"

Lannick puffed furiously, nervously on the cigar.

"Would Don be a good witness, himself a murderer?" Lannick asked. "Wouldn't a jury think he probably wanted to get me into trouble for some reason, carry somebody with him into misery?"

"What's the stallin' for?" O'Toole snapped.

"Yeah," Highpockets said. "Why, 'you're playin' for time, Lannick. We've got the goods on you, as the sayin' is. Don't think we haven't got plenty of evidence. There were a lot of folks in this place to-night. Maybe you didn't notice all those as noticed you."

Lizard had been standing back against the wall, his eyes narrow and

his nostrils dilated. He sniffed continually. That delicate nose of his sensed something wrong in the way of odors.

And suddenly Lizard gave a guttural cry and lurched forward. Before O'Toole or Highpockets Radley could stop him, Lizard's hand shot out, and he slapped the cigar from Lannick's mouth. It curved through the air and fell to the floor in the corner of the office.

"What——" Highpockets began.

"Him poison. Smellum," Lizard explained. "Try killum self."

O'Toole wrenched the door open, and shouted:

"The doctor! Send him here, quick!"

Highpockets had dashed around the end of the desk and grabbed Lannick's wrist as he tried to get a drawer open. The drawer came open, nevertheless, and Highpockets saw an automatic there. He slapped Lannick back into the desk chair and whirled it around.

The doctor came charging in. O'Toole was shouting what had happened. The doctor sniffed the cigar smoke and growled, as he jerked his emergency bag open.

"Rip off his coat and bare his right arm," the doctor snapped. "Got to give him a hypo soon as I get the needle charged. Get a glass of water, O'Toole, so's I can mix some dope. Hustle! This is going to be a close thing. How'd it happen?"

"Tryin' to dodge the hot seat," Highpockets explained. "Had a drugged cigar. Tried to get a gun after Lizard slapped the smoke out of his mouth."

Lannick made a last desperate attempt to struggle, but Highpockets held him securely, and they managed to get his coat off and the sleeve of his shirt rolled up. They forced

him to drink a dose the doctor fixed, then the needle was plunged home, and a life-saving solution shot into Lannick's veins.

For a quarter of an hour they worked.

"That does it," the doctor said finally. "We'll call an ambulance and send him to the hospital—prison ward. He'll live to stand trial, far as this is concerned."

O'Toole called two men and turned over the prisoner. Then he walked along the hall toward the front with Highpockets.

"Listen, sergeant," Highpockets begged. "You spill all this to the newspaper boys and take the credit. I don't want to be bothered with it. You're a professional cop, and have a right to work for promotion. Me, I've got enough, and I'm glad to play along with you chasin' down killers."

"That's pretty decent of you, Highpockets."

"Shucks! Only promise me one thing in return—pull off a good killin' for me some day. One where I can do some old-fashioned chasin' and runnin' down, with maybe some gun slingin'. These here Class-A

homicides—they're too tame. I found a good one in the book. It says:

"206—Homicide, Class D; go prepared for action, this man is a killer.

"That's the kind, Sergeant O'Toole."

"You stick around this town a while, and you'll have plenty of them," O'Toole promised.

Driving slowly back to town, the rate of speed highly conducive to Lizard's comfort and ease, Highpockets made a few remarks:

"A killer's a killer, Lizard, regardless. No matter what the motive or circumstances, a killer's a gent who takes a human life, and that's dead wrong. How'd you like this here affair, Lizard, bein' all tangled up with boiled shirts and women with low-cut gowns?"

"Squaws needum more blankets," Lizard said.

"You know somethin', Lizard? I think you're right," Highpockets told him. "Grab hold of the seat now, 'cause I'm goin' to drive some. I crave to be home and in bed."

Lizard grabbed hold, crouched down in the seat, and began praying to his assortment of gods again.



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HARRISON HOWLAND WAS STRETCHED OUT UPON THE ROSE-COLORED CARPET, HIS EYES OPEN IN A FIXED, DEAD STARE.

DEATH-DEALING LIGHT

BY CHRISTOPHER B. BOOTH

Author of "Dead Man's Key," etc.

CHAPTER I.

SILENCE FOR SALE.

MR. STAUFFER caught his breath sharply, his shrewd eyes bright with a quick flash of excitement, as the idea suddenly streaked through his brain.

He wondered why it hadn't occurred to him before. Usually he

wasn't so slow in sensing the presence of easy money, and he felt a little rueful that it had taken him all these days to realize how circumstances had placed a highly profitable opportunity within the reach of his always itching palm.

His mind fixed upon a tentative figure, then promptly doubled it.

"Ten thousand—not a penny less!"



he decided swiftly. "Dirt cheap at that, for a dame who stands to lose a couple of million."

Luke Stauffer's lips made a smacking sound, spread out into a smug, happy smile. The recent years had been exceedingly lean, and the thought of money like that was pleasant to contemplate.

The ambitious idea had come to him within a very few minutes after he had seated himself at a swiftly, but none the less carefully, chosen table in the small restaurant just around the corner from Park Avenue. Here he could watch the woman he had been shadowing for the past three weeks. At intervals he could pick up fragments of the talk that passed between her and

the handsome young man who was being so attentive to her.

Grace Howland was unquestionably a fascinating woman. Not so youthful perhaps as she wished people to believe, but still excitingly beautiful at thirty-seven.

She had been an actress when the rich and aging Harrison Howland had married her, and while never a conspicuous success on the stage, her training for the drama had given her poise and a lovely voice.

The man with her was Tony Calvert, who lived rather precariously on the slender income of a customer's man for a second-class brokerage firm.

Having made up his mind what he was going to do, Luke Stauffer saw

no reason for delay. He waved aside the waiter who had just arrived to take his order, arose from his chair, and strolled toward the table where Grace Howland and Tony Calvert sat in such intimate and enraptured conversation.

"Not ten thousand—fifteen!" Mr. Stauffer hastily boosted his own figure. "And I'm probably a fool not to put the price even higher!"

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Howland," he said, as he reached the other table. "And you, too, Calvert. Mind if I join you?"

Both of them looked up at Luke Stauffer, startled and confused. There was a moment of disturbed silence during which Stauffer seated himself.

"Should I know you?" Grace Howland meant her voice to be completely chilling, but her indignation didn't quite come off. She was so palpably guilty and no little alarmed.

There was considerably more force to Tony Calvert's indignation as he snapped: "Who the devil are you, anyhow? What do you want?"

Unabashed, Luke Stauffer chuckled, deep down in his throat. Stauffer is the name. I'm a detective. Here's my card. Niblo Detective Agency. I work for 'em. And——"

He gave another and even throatier chuckle as he leaned forward. "A little surprise—the Niblo Agency is working for Mr. Harrison Howland. That's why I've been trailing you two lovebirds for three weeks."

People were frequently surprised to discover that Mr. Stauffer was a detective. His clothes had a distinction, and he possessed an air of gentility which did not fit the popular conception of what is sometimes a very rough and tough trade.

And that was why the Niblo Detective Agency gave him these assignments. Mr. Stauffer could lunch at

Pierre's or hold down a table at a fashionable night club and appear to be in his natural element. That is, unless he talked too much; his speech betrayed him as a sham gentleman.

Grace Howland and Tony Calvert were more than surprised by the announcement of Luke Stauffer's profession. They were both clearly frightened. The woman looked ghastly under her make-up, and young Calvert reached nervously for his water goblet. His voice a little thick, he blurted:

"Grace's husband has been having us watched?"

Stauffer nodded, grining amiably. "That's it, brother."

Grace Howland started putting on an act. "Oh, how dare he! To do such a thing to me! I have done nothing!"

"Don't try to sell *me* that story," cut in Stauffer. "I'm the guy who's been your shadow for the past three weeks? I can tell you more places you've been, and name the hour and minute, then you can remember yourself."

He tapped the breast of his coat. "I've got a little black book here in my pocket, and there's some pretty hot stuff in it. Now lemme see. Hm-m-m. Last Tuesday after you two had luncheon at Roberti's, you got into a Red Circle cab, hack license number 253172, driver's name Pete Latzo, and went——"

"It's a lie!" cried Grace Howland. "I refuse to sit here and be degraded by some—some cheap——"

Stauffer waggled a reproving forefinger. "Not so cheap, Mrs. Howland!" he exclaimed softly. "And dirty cracks like that are likely to make me more expensive. Better take it nice."

With a brittle laugh Tony Calvert said, "We'd better be completely

calm about it, Grace. This man is about to make us some kind of a—well, a business proposition. We'd best listen to it."

Harrison Howland's wife seemed not to understand exactly what was meant, but she calmed down.

"That's better," said Stauffer. "Now it's like this: Somebody sent Mr. Howland an anonymous letter, which is what got him suspicious. Old guys like him, married to beautiful dames, get that way awful easy. So he hires the Niblo Agency to check up. I get the tailin' job. Up to now I ain't turned in my report—nothing definite, y'understand. There's a racket in that. You see, when I don't get a tailin' job, I don't get paid. The game is to make the job last as long as possible.

"But old man Howland is demanding a report. He thinks three weeks is long enough to get the goods on any dame.

"So I gotta turn in my report tomorrow, or maybe the day after. Do you see?"

Evidently Grace Howland didn't. She was confused.

"But, if—if you are working for—for my husband, why do you come and tell me?"

Tony Calvert sneered. "It's perfectly clear, Grace. This is a shake-down. The fellow wants money."

"Listen, you!" rasped Stauffer. "When I want you to chip in with your two cents' worth, I'll ask for it!"

Then he returned his remarks to the woman.

"Now look! Your husband is lousy with dough; he's old, and his health ain't so good. A sick man, I'd say from looking at him. You were sitting pretty, right under the well-known Christmas tree, with a couple of million bucks ready to drop in your lap. But what happens

to that two million if I turn in this report? Lady, do you need the picture in slow-motion?"

Grace Howland's face had a terrified expression.

"The alimony racket ain't what it used to be," went on Stauffer. "Especially for anybody who's been so reckless about leavin' herself wide open. Out in the cold, cold world without a thin dime! That's the way it reads to me. Oh, sure, you're nuts about this guy Calvert, and love's a bowl of cherries or something, but with him only draggin' down fifty bucks a week, it takes a lot of love and affection to make up for two million dollars."

Tony Calvert's face was flushed crimson. The meagerness of his salary was a humiliating thing to have brought up.

"To put it all in a word—black-mail!" Calvert lashed back angrily. "For a price you'll turn in a false report. How much?"

Luke Stauffer picked up a spoon and balanced it carefully across the tip of a middle finger.

"To put it in two words—fifteen grand," he answered softly. "That makes it awful cheap when you consider she stands to lose a lot of dough."

"He means fifteen thousand dollars," Calvert told Grace Howland.

"He's crazy!" she gasped. "Where could I raise anything like that? My quarterly allowance is only—Well, it's six months overdrawn anyhow."

Luke Stauffer gestured with the spoon toward her bejeweled hands.

"The old man seems to have been pretty generous with stuff like that," he said. "Those rocks you're wearing now are only a drop in the bucket to some of the other ice you've got. The night I tailed you to the Fifty-nine Club, some of the customers

mistook you for one of the cut-glass chandeliers.

"Hock shops, lady, was invented for people who gotta raise quick cash."

Grace Howland reached for her cocktail glass and drained what was left of the drink.

"That—that is impossible! I couldn't get away with it! My husband has the combination to the wall safe in my bedroom. He—he often uses it, too. He would see right away that the most valuable pieces were missing. How could I explain?"

Stauffer had a prompt solution of that problem. Grinning shrewdly, he told her:

"Wives have been known to leave safes unlocked, muss things up, and put on an act that they was robbed. They usually get away with it."

He shrugged his shoulders. "That is your end of it. All I am interested in is fifteen thousand bucks, and the answer is either 'yes' or 'no.'"

Mr. Stauffer lighted a cigarette and leaned back in his chair, waiting. He knew Grace Howland would haggle and plead, and try to persuade him with tears; he knew, also, that if he held out for his price, she dared not defy him.

She was Harrison Howland's wife, and she would try to hang on, regardless of the cost, until she became Harrison Howland's widow.

CHAPTER II.

AMBITIOUS EXPECTATIONS.

WHEN she came down to breakfast the following morning, an hour earlier than her usual time, Grace Howland was acutely aware that a night of broken and troubled sleep had done a damage beyond the repair of cos-

metics. She stepped out onto the broad, red-bricked terrace, walking briskly back and forth as she filled her lungs with the crisp morning air, trying to whip some color into her pale, strained face.

Early as she was, when she turned back into the house and went into the dining room, Byron Crutchfield, her husband's secretary, was already there, finishing one of his usual hearty breakfasts.

Byron Crutchfield, who for a long time had been considerably more than a mere secretary, was a plumpish man with thinning hair beginning to gray at the temples, and quick, alert eyes windowed behind a pair of nose glasses which never strayed out of place.

Grace felt herself flush resentfully as Byron turned his head and looked at her. His white, even teeth flashed in a smile, and that annoyed her, too. Almost everything he did and said annoyed her.

For five years—ever since her marriage to Harrison Howland—she and the secretary had disliked each other with an intensity not far removed from hatred. It always infuriated Grace that he was able to conceal his feelings behind this smiling mask of counterfeit friendliness. Only occasionally did the mask slip.

"Well, this is an unexpected pleasure!" boomed Byron Crutchfield. "It's not often any of us get a chance to catch a glimpse of you so early in the morning. Keep it up!"

Grace Howland's eyes narrowed, showed green flecks, as they always did when the cat in her was aroused; they struck a cold fire in Byron's direction.

"You simply overwhelm me!" she snapped.

Byron, even more overflowing with benevolence than usual, ignored her antagonism.

"Let me recommend the creamed eggs," he said enthusiastically. "The new cook is absolutely tops."

Barrows came in from the butler's pantry. He looked gaunt and haggard, and there was a furtive air about him, which his usual poker-faced self-control was unable to conceal.

Ned Barrows was sixty-one, yet no one had ever thought of him as being an old man; but during the past week his age seemed to have suddenly caught up with him. His shoulders had lost their military erectness, his feet dragged as he walked; he made clumsy mistakes, was tardy about answering his bells, and in unguarded moments there was a frightened look in his eyes.

Grace Howland stared at Barrows, thinking: "I wonder what's come over the man? If this sort of thing keeps up, I shall have to insist that Harrison discharge him."

She told Barrows that she wanted only toast and coffee.

As the butler departed, she found Byron Crutchfield's gaze fixed upon her with peculiar intentness. He glanced quickly away, but not before she thought she had read something in his eyes—as though he might be gloating over a secret triumph.

It was as if he were saying to himself: "Well, old girl, it's been a long wait, but I've finally got you right where I want you!"

Then, in a flash, Grace Howland knew, as certainly as she had ever known anything in her life, who had written the anonymous letter to her husband, tipping him off that she was running around with young Tony Calvert. Byron Crutchfield had written it!

Three weeks ago a detective had been put on her trail, and for exactly three weeks Byron had been even

more than ordinarily polite! It added up a simple two and two.

The motive, of course, was crystal clear. Byron had seen his chance to get rid of her, and return himself to Harrison Howland's full favor, with no one left standing between him and the Howland millions.

Byron Crutchfield had entered Harrison Howland's employ fresh out of college. The son of a boyhood friend, Howland had taken a great fancy to him, making him a personal companion as well as a secretary.

Howland having no family of his own to claim either his affection or fortune, Byron had nursed ambitious expectations in this direction. His hopes had appeared well-founded until, coming back from Europe, Harrison Howland and Grace Dixon met on shipboard, and he promptly became infatuated with her.

Byron had tried every trick he could command, to break it up, and while he had failed, Grace still hated him for it. After the marriage, fighting with a woman's weapons, she had, in retaliation, done her best to completely turn her husband against Byron. The effort had been only partially successful. Byron managed to hang on, watching for his chance.

And now he had it!

Grace didn't know how Byron had discovered her friendship with Calvert. Possibly, she thought, he had steamed open one of her letters; or he might have listened in on a telephone conversation.

Finished with his breakfast, Byron Crutchfield pushed back in his chair and lighted a cigarette. Tilting back his head, he blew a stream of smoke toward the ceiling.

"Off to New York again this morn-

ing—is that the reason for this early rising?" he asked, and while the question sounded casual enough, Grace felt sure he was hugely enjoying the thought that she wouldn't know that every move she made would be under surveillance.

"If you're so interested in my trips to New York, why don't you shadow me yourself?" she blazed. "You think you've been extraordinarily clever, don't you, Mr. Crutchfield?"

Byron's face was screened by a haze of cigarette smoke. When it cleared away, his features registered a complete blank.

"I beg your pardon? Shadowing? Am I supposed to know what you mean?"

Grace Howland's laugh was shrill with contempt and anger. "Oh, yes, very clever indeed, Mr. Crutchfield! But I happen to know who wrote that letter—and that doesn't make it quite so clever, does it? Your little plot isn't going to work, Byron. You see, I happened to discover——"

Her outburst ended on a note of dismay, as she realized what a terrible blunder she had made in letting it slip out that she knew her movements had been watched.

Byron's eyes were inscrutable behind the gleaming lenses of his glasses, as he apparently waited for her to continue. Grace wasn't very quick-witted when it came to thinking her way out of a sudden emergency; anyhow the damage was done beyond repair.

"Yes?" Byron's voice was soft, perhaps a little too soft. "You were saying——"

Barrows came in with Grace's toast and coffee on a silver server. The butler cleared his throat, and looked at Crutchfield.

"Mr. Howland has just called on the house phone, sir. He is slightly indisposed this morning and having

breakfast in his room. He requests you to bring the mail at the earliest possible moment."

Byron picked up the pile of letters from the table and got briskly to his feet.

"As much as I dislike unfinished mysteries," he said pleasantly, "I'm afraid it will have to wait. Unless, of course, it's something you'd really like me to know immediately."

"As if you didn't already!" Grace flung out at him. "You—you and your smug, smirking superiority! Oh, I could kill you!"

Crutchfield laughed quietly and strode out of the room, leaving Grace Howland in a state of increasing consternation which swiftly reached panic. Her beautiful hands were trembling as she creamed and sugared her coffee, and lifted the cup to her lips.

"You fool!" she accused herself. "To let your temper run away with your tongue like that!"

In a mounting frenzy of apprehension, she tried to measure the danger which the slip might involve.

Grace didn't know, of course, whether her husband had taken Byron into his confidence about employing the detective agency. If that were the case, Byron's next move would be simple and direct. He would merely go to Harrison Howland and say:

"The detective agency report is quite worthless, sir. Grace knows you've been having her watched, so undoubtedly she's been careful to make no false move."

But even if Byron wasn't supposed to know about the espionage, that wouldn't stop him from finding a way to pass along the information. Not a clever chap like Byron!

And then, with some of the best pieces of her jewelry missing, the seed of suspicion would have already

been planted in fertile soil. Byron—damn his cunning—would guess almost instantly that it was a fake robbery. He might even guess why it had suddenly become necessary for her to convert her gems into secret cash.

Grace got up nervously from the breakfast table and moved through the open French doors onto the terrace.

The Howland country house occupied a high knoll, commanding a wide sweep of view. It was called "a million-dollar-show place." Seven men were required to keep up the grounds. There was a private swimming pool. The garage—a palace as she had measured luxury in the days of her early poverty—housed half a dozen expensive motor cars.

Grace's terror mounted at the thought that a few stolen hours might lose her all this—the life she had schemed almost twenty years to get. In a constantly increasing frenzy, she tried to decide what was the best thing to do, but her imagination was not equal to such an emergency.

For a moment she considered, then rejected, the idea that Tony Calvert might be able to tell her what she should do. Clever advice was what she needed, and Tony was a little on the dumb side when it came to thinking his way out of difficult situations.

Then Grace Howland remembered Luke Stauffer, the private detective. The man, of course, was a downright crook, and she loathed him, but he did have a mind which traveled in devious ways, and a genius for intrigue appeared to be the desperate need of the moment.

She decided to get into New York and see Luke Stauffer as quickly as she possibly could.

CHAPTER III.

A VERY SICK MAN.

WHEN Byron Crutchfield got upstairs, he did not, for all his apparent haste, go directly to Harrison Howland's room with the morning mail. Instead he turned into the west wing of the house and went to his own quarters, taking the fat packet of letters with him. There was one of them he had use for.

What he was about to do was something that no man could be proud of; so, as a precaution against the embarrassment of accidental discovery, he turned the key in the lock before proceeding with a distasteful piece of business.

Swiftly entering his private bathroom, Byron Crutchfield opened the medicine cabinet and took down an electric vaporizer which he had used last winter for treating a cold. More recently it had served another purpose.

He turned on the water tap and ran a small amount of hot water into the vaporizer. It would take less time to raise a steam with the water already heated.

Plugging the electric cord into the wall outlet over the wash basin, Byron flipped through the letters to find the one he wanted. The corner of the envelope bore an uninformative return address which said:

P. O. Box 735,
Garrick Street Station,
New York City.

Byron knew from previous prying that the letter came from the Niblo Detective Agency.

After two or three minutes the water in the vaporizer began to boil, and a thin cloud of steam drifted out of the metal spout. Byron Crutchfield passed the envelope back

and forth, expertly steaming open the flap.

The communication, signed by the superintendent of the detective agency, said:

We are inclosing the daily report of our operative, C-12, which speaks for itself.

While we fully understand your impatience to have the investigation brought to a swift conclusion, our experience is that it often requires many weeks to arrive at the truth of these matters.

As you will note, the party under investigation yesterday made a lengthy phone call from a hotel telephone booth which, unfortunately, our operative was unable to overhear. C-12 is one of our most efficient men, and he feels that a break is definitely in prospect.

May we suggest that he be allowed to continue for a few days longer, and—

There was more, but Byron Crutchfield found the rest of neither interest nor importance. He glanced at the attached operative's report, signed with Luke Stauffer's agency number, C-12; quickly he read Stauffer's fictitious description of Grace Howland's movements in New York for the preceding day.

With Grace knowing she was being watched, the report was what Byron should have expected.

"A hell of a detective agency!" grunted Crutchfield. "And she'll watch her step after this. They'll never get anything on her now."

A meditative frown rode across his forehead as he put the two sheets of paper back in the envelope and resealed it, careful not to let the flap betray any noticeable evidence that it had been tampered with. Then he slipped it back into the middle of the pile, disconnected the vaporizer, and hastened out into the hall.

When he reached Harrison Howland's room, Byron found the door standing open, and the old man sitting in a chair, his tall, gaunt frame wrapped in a dressing gown. He

looked very pale and worn. His breakfast tray rested on a low table in front of him, but he had drunk only a little of his orange juice. The rest of the food was untouched.

There could be no question about it; Harrison Howland was a sick man. His failing health had been apparent for some months, but the progress of the illness had been so gradual that no real alarm had been felt over his condition.

Byron Crutchfield jarred to a startled pause, shocked by his employer's appearance.

"Barrows told me you were indisposed, but I had no idea that it might be anything serious!" he exclaimed. "Have you called Doctor Belding?"

Harrison Howland seemed to have some difficulty getting his breath. His words had a labored sound as he answered: "Yes, I had Barrows call the doctor. He'll be here presently. Gas pains around my heart. Thought for a few minutes the old pump was going to quit on me. Acute indigestion—that's what it is. Got to be more careful about my diet."

He plucked a handkerchief from the pocket of his dressing gown, swabbed it across his forehead, which glistened with beads of cold perspiration, and reached out a lean, patrician hand for the mail. With nervous swiftness he flicked through the packet of envelopes until he reached the one he was looking for.

Byron Crutchfield knew in advance which letter it would be; for the past three weeks the detective agency's daily report had been Harrison Howland's first interest of the morning. He knew, too, the agony of suspicion, doubt, and uncertainty which tortured the old man's mind.

Harrison Howland's marriage to Grace Dixon had been an emotional

flash-back to his youth; an attempt to recapture the exciting flavor of a romance which once had been cheated.

Grace did perhaps bear some haunting resemblance to Eleanor Lindley, but it was probably mostly in Howland's imagination that the likeness became so vivid. He had found it easy to create the illusion that Grace was a physical reincarnation, sent back to him from the grave to breathe the breath of life into a dead dream.

In the wisdom of his years there must have been moments when he realized it was pure self-delusion, but for five years he had clung to it with an almost pitiful determination to believe that he and Grace loved each other with a rare and tender passion which adequately bridged the difference in their ages. He had not permitted himself to believe otherwise; he did not want to believe it now.

While Crutchfield watched, Harrison Howland tore open the envelope, read the daily report from the detective agency and the attached letter signed by J. B. Mead, superintendent of the investigation service. There was evident relief in the old man's face, just as there had been every morning to discover that the report was still negative.

While he stood waiting, Byron cudgeled his wits, trying to think of some way that he could give Howland a hint of the truth. But his own position was extremely delicate, and he had to be careful about betraying his intense personal interest in the matter. So he remained silent.

Harrison Howland put the communication back into the envelope and sat thoughtful, a frown creasing across his forehead. He seemed to be breathing with less effort now.

"I've been a fool!" he exclaimed suddenly. "I shouldn't have dignified that letter by paying any attention to it. I should have ignored it completely."

Byron Crutchfield cleared his throat, and a flush of embarrassment crept into the other man's pale cheeks.

"Nothing—nothing at all," he said hurriedly before the other could speak. "Just thinking aloud. And Byron——"

"Yes, Mr. Howland."

"Before we proceed with the mail, I'd like you to get me something from downstairs. A clipping I took out of the editorial page of yesterday's *Evening Standard*. I left it in the study."

Byron Crutchfield sensed it was a manufactured excuse to get him out of the room for a few minutes; those ever alert eyes of his had seen Howland's glance stray toward the telephone.

"Yes, Mr. Howland; immediately," Byron responded, and promptly moved across the room and out into the hall, closing the door behind him.

Harrison Howland took another look at the letterhead of the Niblo Detective Agency, confirming his memory of the telephone number. Then he got up from his chair, picked up the bedroom extension of the phone and called that number. A moment later he was saying crisply:

"This is Harrison Howland. I've just got your letter and the last report. And it is the last report, Mr. Mead; you are to consider the investigation closed."

The superintendent of the detective agency made some sort of response.

"If I hadn't been a damned old fool, I wouldn't have started it in the first place," Howland retorted

sharply. "I am convinced that my wife's conduct is above reproach. So, if you please, render me your bill and drop the matter entirely."

Harrison Howland hung up the telephone and returned to his chair. Two or three minutes later the door opened, and Byron Crutchfield came back into the room.

"The clipping seems to be mislaid," he said. "I wasn't able to find it."

Howland moved his hand in a gesture. "It's of no great importance. Forget it."

The faintest shadow of a smile flitted across Crutchfield's mouth. He knew the clipping was a mere fiction, so he hadn't even bothered to go downstairs looking for it.

Instead, he had been listening outside the door.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BUTLER'S SECRET.

WHEN he was through serving breakfast, Ned Barrows, the Howland butler, slipped hurriedly out of the pantry with a paper-wrapped package under his arm, and made his way to the third floor of the house. His movements seemed unnecessarily secret, for, having been more than ten years in Harrison Howland's employ, he certainly should have been entitled to the full freedom of the house, and especially to the third floor which contained the servants' sleeping quarters.

Reaching the narrow, dimly lighted corridor at the top of the stairs, Barrows paused and listened, making sure that he was in no danger of being observed. Then he took a key from his pocket and unlocked the door which opened into another and steeper flight of steps leading to the attic space above.

Here was stored such odds and ends as accumulate in a large house. No one had ever forbidden or questioned Barrow's going there, but, before ascending this last flight, he carefully relocked the door behind him.

Toward the front of the house, under the eaves, a section of the attic had been partitioned off into a room and lined with cedar to make it mothproof for the storage of winter clothing and wool blankets. It was here that Ned Barrows went, walking quietly on the balls of his feet, trying to keep the bare boards from squeaking under his weight.

Reaching the door of the storeroom, the furtive butler rapped with his knuckles lightly against the panel; one tap following two others in what appeared to be a prearranged signal. In response, there were sounds of guarded movements from within, the creak of bed springs, a muffled footfall, followed by the rasping sound of a bolt being drawn out of its hasp; then the door moved open on recently oiled, noiseless hinges.

Immediately there rushed out into the attic the pungent odor of strong antiseptics. A face appeared, making an indistinct blur in the gloom, for, although it was daylight, the single window of the storeroom was heavily curtained, not so much for the purpose of shutting out the light as to keep a light from within betraying itself to some one who might happen to be out on the grounds at night, and perhaps think it strange to see the window of the storeroom agleam.

Ned Barrows slipped into the room, closed the door behind him. "I've brought your breakfast," he said. "Turn on the light, Herbie."

The light snapped on, revealing a tall, rather handsome and very

scared-looking youngster of nineteen or twenty, who stood against the background of the sloping attic ceiling. One of his legs was bandaged above the knee, where a policeman's bullet had plowed through the muscles and scraped across the bone.

"You'd better let me dress the wound before you eat," Barrows said hurriedly. "I mustn't be away from downstairs too long."

The boy eased himself onto the single-width cot which Barrows had moved into the storage room from another part of the attic. His lips twisted in a grimace of pain as the movement shot a stab of agony through his leg.

"I feel like a heel, letting you risk your job—and maybe letting you in for a lot worse than that, if the cops get Pinky," he muttered. "I guess the law could send you to prison for harboring a fugitive from justice."

Ned Barrows moistened his lips. His veined hands trembled a little as he made ready the fresh bandages and a strong antiseptic solution.

"That's all right, Herbie," he answered huskily. "I'm willing to take the risk, if"—a recurrent doubt stole back into his mind—"if you've told me the truth about how you got into this mess."

"I guess maybe it does sound like a sob story I cooked up to work on your sympathy, but it happened just like I told you. On the level, gramp, I didn't know Pinky was that kind of a guy. Why, I didn't even know he had a rod."

The kid's body flinched tauter, and clammy perspiration broke out all over him, as the probe with medicated gauze twisted around the end pushed into the open wound, and the antiseptic burned like liquid fire. After a moment the torment eased a little. With a gulp he went on:

"Also, like I told you, I'd been over to New Jersey, looking for a job. I didn't get it. Had to hitch-hike back; just a nickel left for ferry fare.

"This Pinky Davis came breezing along Highway 6 in a nice-looking car, and picked me up. Oh, sure, I knew it wasn't his wagon, but why shouldn't I swallow the story he handed me about gettin' paid five bucks to drive it from Trenton to New York? Honest, gramp, I didn't know what kind of a guy he was, except that maybe he was a little down on work.

"Anyhow it was a free ride, and I climbed in. We stopped at a hot-dog stand and he blew me to a sandwich and a couple of beers. He had some hard stuff on him, but I never fooled around with the hard stuff."

No less than six times Barrows had listened to this same account of Herbie's predicament, and it always relieved him that the details were the same. The liar usually embellishes his tale with each retelling.

"You must already know it by heart," went on Herbie. "Pinky asked me if I wanted to take the wheel. Well, I've always been nuts about cars, and I thought that was swell.

"The gas run low, and when Pinky told me to stop at the gas station there didn't seem to be anything wrong about that—not even when he told me to keep the motor running. I guess I was a darn sap not to tumble, but I didn't.

"And then he stuck up the gas station, and came running out with the gat in his hand and told me to step on the gas and drive like hell. And I was scared not to.

"Pinky locked the gas-station guy in the wash room, but there was a window and the bird got out and jingled the cops right away. We'd

got only six or seven miles when that State trooper on a motor cycle was tearing after us. He said 'Pull over,' and I pulled over—and that's when Pinky plugged him.

"The cop went down with his gun blazing away at us—and I got that slug in my leg.

"That's exactly like it was, gramp; on the level it was just like that. We went on another couple of miles, ditched the car, and took to the woods. Pretty soon I saw what kind of an idea was getting in Pinky's head. I had a bullet in me; maybe I'd get caught and squeal. He was going to rub me out—there in the woods.

"I watched my chance and tripped him. He dropped the gun, and I got it away from him. Somehow or other, I got across the river and come here. I couldn't think of no other place to go. You—you've been swell, gramp."

Somehow or another, a butler is seldom thought of as having a family. It probably would have been a matter of considerable amazement to almost everybody who knew Ned Barrows that the old fellow had a grandson.

Herbie Sloan was his daughter's boy. Milly had been dead a good many years, and Herbie's father had married again. Barrows hadn't seen much of the youngster until the last ten or twelve months, when Charley Sloan had moved back East and promptly gotten himself killed by a truck.

"You should have told me you couldn't get a job and needed money," Barrows said huskily. "I'd have done something for you, lad."

Herbie twisted his head to one side and looked up into his grandfather's harassed face.

"Yes, gramp, I guess you would have. You've proven to me what a

swell guy you are. But I kind of wanted to stand on my own feet. It seemed pretty darn nervy to come barging in on a relative you haven't seen since you was just a punk of a kid, and start asking for favors.

"I thought——"

There was something in old Barrows's eyes which warned Herbie Sloan of a new danger and sent a stab of fear through the boy.

"Gramp! What's the matter? Have—have the cops caught Pinky? He squealed—and tried to hang the rap around my neck—is that it?"

Ned Barrows had finished dressing the wound. Pulling the last bandage firmly in place, he stepped back, wetting his lips.

"No, Herbie, the police haven't caught Pinky—and they mustn't catch you! The State trooper—died last night. I heard it over the radio on the seven o'clock news broadcast this morning."

Herbie Sloan jerked to a sitting position on the narrow cot, his eyes bulging and glazed with horror and terror.

"The cop—dead?" he blurted hoarsely. "I—I didn't know he'd been hit that bad." He caught and clung to old Barrows's veined hands. "The police—they'll never believe I wasn't in on that stick-up! It—this means the electric chair—if they find me!"

Barrows's throat was working as he stared past the top of his grandson's head, his gaze fixed unseeingly on the heavily curtained attic window. After a long pause he slowly moved his head in a nod.

"Yes, Herbie," he agreed, "I'm afraid you're right. I believe you. I believe it was all like you say, but getting the police to believe you—or even a jury to believe you—that would be different.

"That—that's what I meant when

I said we mustn't let the police find you."

Herbie's fear mounted into a frenzy.

"I've got to get out of here!" he cried thickly. "It's not safe to stay! Not now! Pinky—drinks too much, talks too much! Some night he'll get crazy with booze and start shooting off his mouth in some bar. The cops will get him and then—then he'll try to hang the rap for that murder around *my* neck. I tell you I've got to get out of here!"

"That's impossible," Barrows answered. "You can't go anywhere until that wound in your leg is healed. It's still badly infected."

CHAPTER V.

A CALL TO DEATH.

AT a quarter past six the following evening Byron Crutchfield came downstairs, wearing a white gabardine dinner jacket and black trousers. He made a very handsome figure as he appeared on the terrace, where Harrison Howland sat in a wicker lounge chair, apparently much recovered from his heart attack of the previous morning.

Howland's face had lost its strained, haggard look, and his mind, too, seemed at ease now that he had flatly and finally rejected the suspicion concerning his wife.

Crutchfield swung briskly across the width of the terrace, pausing beside the other man's chair.

"The Matsons have asked me over to dinner and a session of bridge," he said. "I accepted the invitation before I knew you were to be alone to-night, but if you prefer me to remain with you I shall call the engagement off—gladly so."

Harrison Howland looked up. "I shan't be alone; Grace will be here."

Byron snapped open his cigarette case, lighted himself a smoke, and flipped the match into the shrubbery.

"Then Barrows neglected to tell you," he explained. "I can't understand what's come over the fellow. He's becoming absolutely worthless as a butler."

"Grace telephoned from New York during the afternoon while you were having your nap. I took the message and instructed Barrows to tell you when you were awake."

"It seems, sir, that Edith Lancaster is sailing on the *City of Paris*, and her friends are giving her a farewell dinner at the Ritz. Grace has decided to stay over in town for the going-away party and motor home a little after nine with Edith's family."

"Oh, I see," responded Harrison Howland, and his voice betrayed a note of disappointment. When she had gone rushing off to New York again this morning, Grace had kissed him warmly, assuring him she would be home early for dinner. In his pocket was a check for five thousand dollars which he had meant slipping under her dinner plate.

Grace, of course, wasn't to know the emotional impulse behind the gift, but the check was to be his atonement for having suspected her of an indiscretion.

"If you prefer not to be alone, I'll ring up the Matsons and tell them I can't make it," offered Byron. "It'll be quite all right with me."

Harrison Howland's smile was strained and tinged with bitterness as he said:

"The old must expect to be alone. By all means keep your appointment, Byron. I would really prefer you should. You see, it was my wife's company that I wanted this evening. I had planned to give her a little surprise."

Before he had come out of the

house, Byron Crutchfield had already telephoned the garage for his own car to be brought around. The cream-colored roadster poked its glittering chromium nose through the shrubbery which screened the driveway and halted at the foot of the terrace steps. Arthur Travis, the Howland chauffeur, got out from behind the wheel.

"I feel guilty as the devil about leaving you alone, sir," Byron told Howland. "I've given Barrows the Matsons' phone number in case I might be wanted for anything."

"You'll not be wanted," the old man answered, almost curtly, and Byron, feeling rebuffed, made no further response as he went down to the driveway, and got into his car. A moment later the roadster had swung out of sight, lost to view behind the thick foliage.

Dinner at the Howland house was always at eight, and at that hour Barrows found Harrison Howland still sitting on the terrace in the thickening gloom of gathering nightfall, chin sunk down on his chest.

"Dinner is served, sir," announced Barrows.

Harrison Howland gave a slight start, and got to his feet a little stiffly.

"Would you like to take my arm, sir?" suggested Barrows.

"Thank you, Barrows, but I think I can manage."

They entered the house and went into the dining room, where the butler pulled out the chair at the head of the table.

The dining room was too large and somber a space for a man to eat alone in either cheerfulness or comfort. Howland's feeling of depression and emptiness grew as he proceeded with his simple meal. The continued silence became oppressive, almost maddening.

Suddenly he noticed, really for the first time, how Barrows had aged and broken. It gave him a feeling of kinship with his servant.

"We are getting old, Barrows; yes, we are getting very old—you and I. We're breaking up fast—both of us; traveling to the end of the last mile. I wonder if you find it has all been a pretty futile business?"

It was entirely without precedent for Harrison Howland to speak with a servant like this, and the butler was so overwhelmed by surprise that he found himself struck dumb. All he could do was stare with his mouth hanging open.

"I suppose, Barrows," went on the master, "that you've always had an idea that money was the key to happiness. Most people do."

Barrows gulped. "No, sir; not exactly, sir. I've been employed by a number of wealthy people at various times. I have seen some of them quite unhappy."

"Too much money is a poison, Barrows. It does deadly things to people; warps their point of view; sets the cancer of greed to eating out their souls.

"Now there's Byron Crutchfield; would you say that he is genuinely fond of me?"

"It—it has always seemed so, sir," the butler replied with caution.

"Wrong!" exclaimed Harrison Howland, his voice sharp with bitterness. "His father was my best friend; the boy was poor. I tried to treat him as a son—to put him in my heart as a son.

"And what happens? His mind is constantly filled with one idea: to get as much of my money as he can; to keep away from me any other people that I might happen to like.

"Then there is Mrs. Howland; would you say that my wife loves me, Barrows?"

The butler's face flamed crimson with embarrassment. In his many years of service he had never had such an experience.

"One can never be positive about a woman, sir," he evaded miserably.

Howland nodded slowly. "I can pick the right answer out of that," he said. "Well, let them have the money, Barrows. Yes, let them have it. Perhaps it'll not bring them the happiness they expect. It may even end up by making them miserable. If I had life to live over again——"

Before Harrison Howland could finish, the telephone had started ringing in the front hall, and Barrows, welcoming a chance to escape from a highly embarrassing situation, made haste to answer it.

A moment later he was back in the dining-room doorway again.

"It's for you, sir," he said. "Mrs. Howland is calling from New York. She says it is most urgent that she speak to you at once."

Harrison Howland pushed back his chair before Barrows could reach him, and was on his way to the telephone.

Grace's voice had an agitated, unnatural sound as it came over the wire. It was shrilly pitched as she said:

"Darling, I am so worried that I just had to call you—right in the middle of Edith's dinner. It—it's about my jewelry, Harrison dear. I got to thinking about it, and I'm not sure—not at all sure, I locked the wall safe with almost everything in it.

"Some of the best and biggest pieces. I didn't wear them to-day, and I just can't swallow down another mouthful of this perfectly gorgeous food until I'm sure they are all right.

"Would it be asking too much, darling, for you to make certain for me.

I'll hold onto the phone. Hurry, please, or I'll simply die of anxiety!"

"I'll send Barrows up to look," Howland told her.

It seemed not to occur to Grace that it might be a bad thing for her husband, with a not overly strong heart, to go rushing up and down stairs.

"Oh, no, not Barrows!" she cried sharply. "Please do it yourself, Harrison. Barrows has been acting so strangely lately." Her voice dropped to a whisper. "That's one of the reasons I am so worried."

"Nonsense!" Howland retorted.

"And more than that," Grace's voice rushed on, "there was the man I had from the village refinishing the floors. He—he was working in the hall just outside my room when I left. Oh, please do hurry and find out if everything is all right!"

"Very well," Howland answered quietly, "hang onto the line and, after I've looked, I'll speak to you again from the extension in your room upstairs."

Barrows, through the dining-room doorway, saw Harrison Howland mount the stairs to the second floor. Several minutes passed, and Howland hadn't come down again.

The telephone started to emit a series of clicking sounds, such as happens when the operator is trying to signal a number with the receiver off the hook. Barrows moved out into the hall to replace it, but he thought it might be best to be sure if some one still wanted to be connected.

"Yes?" said the butler.

Grace Howland was still on the line. Her voice was raised to a hysterical pitch.

"Is that you, Harrison? Why has it taken you so long to answer? Has something happened? Is that the reason——"

"Barrows speaking, madam," the butler told her. "Mr. Howland has gone upstairs. He——"

"Of course he's gone upstairs!" shrilled Grace Howland. "I sent him upstairs! But why must it take all this time? You go up there right away—to my room—and tell my husband that I'm waiting."

Barrows obediently hurried up the stairs, reached the second floor, and turned along the corridor to the right. The door into Grace Howland's bedroom was a few inches open, but Barrows made no attempt to enter until he had rapped on the panel, calling out Mr. Howland's name.

There was no response. Barrows, after a moment's hesitation, pushed the door wider open and had taken only a half-finished step across the threshold, when his body recoiled, and a hoarse exclamation burst from his lips at the sight which met his startled and horrified gaze.

Harrison Howland was stretched out upon the rose-colored carpet, his eyes open in a fixed, dead stare. Both hands clutched at his throat, and the back of his head rested in a vividly ugly crimson pool.

One look was enough to tell Ned Barrows that Howland was dead from violence.

CHAPTER VI.

MISSING BROTHER.

THE first thing Barrows did, when he had sufficiently recovered from the first shock of his discovery to do anything at all, was to stumble across the room and reach a trembling hand toward the telephone.

"This is Barrows, madam—speaking from upstairs," he blurted thickly. "I—I've just found Mr. Howland. He seems——" For an

instant the words stuck in his throat. "Mr. Howland seems to have had—an accident. I'll call the doctor immediately, and I think—I think you'd best get home as quickly as you possibly can."

Grace Howland must have understood that Barrows was trying to soften the blow, but she made no violent outcry; just a brushing, whispering sound as she breathed sharply into the mouthpiece at the other end of the telephone. Then she said, her voice very low:

"Is my husband dead, Barrows?"

"I'm afraid—yes," he told her.

"He'd eaten his dinner?" Grace's words were low-pitched, faint. "Then it must have been another attack of gastritis. I shouldn't have been away! I—I'll be home immediately."

Ned Barrows hung up the telephone, doing his best to stifle the sudden surge of fear that stabbed through him, as that hideous red stain, soaking into the carpet under Mr. Howland's head, seemed to leap out and meet his eyes halfway.

"No, it's not gastritis," he said under his breath; "it's murder!"

The butler's eyes darted about the room, came to a rest on the open door of Mrs. Howland's clothes closet. A light burned within. The closet was equipped with an arrangement whereby the opening of the door automatically snapped on a switch which illuminated an incandescent bulb which protruded from the wall above the frame of the door.

The old butler spun around, raced from the room and toward the rear hall. He went pounding up the third-floor stairs, taking the steps three at a time.

Reaching the door which closed off the attic stairs, he knew that if he found it still locked, his fears were probably unfounded.

But the door wasn't locked. As Barrows turned the knob, the panel swung toward him, and then it was easy to see how Herbie had got out. The inside of the door frame was unfinished and it had been a simple matter for the boy to use a piece of metal—probably a knife blade—to spring the bolt free.

"I could have forgotten to lock it myself," muttered the butler. "I might have forgotten."

Yet he really knew he hadn't, and when he rushed on up into the space under the eaves, it was no actual surprise to discover the entrance to the cedar room yawning open. There could be no further doubt of it now, Herbie had cleared out.

Still, such is man's stubbornness in clinging to the last hope, old Barrows floundered on through the darkness softly calling his grandson's name.

"Herbie! Are you here, Herbie?"

Herbie was gone, but he had left a note. Barrows found it on the pillow of the cot, a hasty pencil scrawl on a torn scrap of paper. It said:

Dear gramp: I'm so scared I'm almost nuts. Like I told you, that guy "Pinky" hits the hard stuff and he likes to shoot off his mouth when he's got a snootful of hooch. The cops are sure to get him, and he's bound to be sore on me for tripping him and taking away his gun. He'll try to take me to the chair with him.

Before I knew what I was getting into, I'd told him you was a butler working for a rich family named Howland.

So you see why I can't keep on hanging around here. It would get you in a jam sure. I'm clearing out.

Old Ned Barrows's hands were trembling as he took a match from his pocket and burned the note. Then he darted down the two flights of stairs. His breath wheezed noisily past his dry, parched lips as he

rushed back into Mrs. Howland's bedroom.

"I see how it happened," he panted; "I see exactly how it happened! The boy didn't mean to do it. He was sneaking out of the house. It's a big house, and he got mixed up in the halls; heard Mr. Howland coming up the stairs and darted inside the nearest door—and it happened to be *her* room. Mr. Howland caught him, probably hiding in the closet, thought he was a burglar, and then—then this awful thing happened.

"Yes, that must have been the way it was. He couldn't be a deliberate killer—not Milly's boy!"

Had he investigated the closet and seen the open safe, looted and empty, with Mrs. Harrison Howland's jewel boxes scattered about the floor, even Barrows himself might have found it difficult to formulate such a charitable theory as to what had happened.

Before he reluctantly moved toward the telephone to summon the police, the distraught old butler wiped away a number of fingerprints which he feared might be Herbie's.

CHAPTER VII.

UNEXPECTED WITNESS.

THE murder call had caught Sergeant Kirby Lane attending a fashionable dance at the Rim Rock Country Club, but most emphatically not for social reasons. Kirby Lane was a hard-working cop and no ballroom dandy. And while the eyes of more than one débutante had lingered in the direction of his tall, well-knit figure, properly attired in the habiliments of a well-turned-out gentleman, his own mind was fixed exclusively on a strictly official matter. For a month and a half he had been following the

dim and shadowy trail of a mysterious Eastchester *Raffles* who was supposed to be getting an amazing fund of inside information by palming himself off as a respectable citizen and hobnobbing with the rich.

There were three men in the speeding police car which had snatched Kirby Lane from his country club assignment. That could wait; murder couldn't.

A State trooper named Blindloss had the wheel, and fed the gas with a maniacal delight for speed. Doctor Hamlin, the State police medical examiner, sat in the rear seat beside Lane. For the last few minutes the doctor had been trying to give Kirby a ribbing.

"First time you ever went out on a murder case wearing the old soup-and-fish, eh, Kirby? Too bad this croak didn't happen in Poverty Patch, then the dead man *would* have got a surprise!

"Mr. Kirby Lane, the gent detective! Sees all, knows all, and pulls fancy tricks out of the silk hat he wears when he goes around gumshoeing! If only the boys down in the old Fourth Ward could see you now!"

"Either shut your trap, or I'll shut it for you!" growled Kirby Lane. "I'm in no mood to have it rubbed in."

Doctor Hamlin let out a startled yelp and suddenly lost interest in the fun of getting Kirby Lane's goat as the police car careened wildly, missing a truck by inches.

"This fellow Blindloss is crazy!" he gasped. "Slow him down a bit, Kirby, or they'll be holding a post-mortem over us!"

"Maybe he's got a peeve against medical examiners who try to be funny," grunted Kirby Lane, then snapped at Trooper Blindloss: "Ease

up, Tom; that was just a little too close."

Half a mile farther on, the car turned in at the Howland country house and swept around the broad curves of the driveway to the great rambling house, looking as gloomy as death itself in the darkness. As the machine stopped at the terrace steps, and the three men got out, the entrance door of the house swung back, and Barrows stood silhouetted in the opening, waiting to let them in.

"This way, gentlemen," the butler said huskily, and led the way toward the stairs.

A moment later they were in Grace Howland's bedroom and Doctor Hamlin hurriedly made the usual preliminary examination to determine whether or not life was extinct. It does sometimes happen that a man isn't as dead as he looks.

Kirby Lane let his gaze drift slowly about the room, carefully taking in all the details. There did not seem to be anything in particular to fix his attention on. Trooper Blindloss stood near the doorway with Barrows, arms folded across his chest, waiting impatiently to discover what happened.

The trooper, with a future eye on a plain-clothes job with the detective division, had a passion for watching police work, and especially he liked seeing Kirby Lane in action.

Doctor Hamlin turned his head and looked at Sergeant Lane.

"This man has been dead about three quarters of an hour," he said crisply. "Now the next job is to find out what killed him. From the looks of this blood, I'd call it a reasonably safe guess that his head's been caved in—struck from behind."

Kirby Lane, very uncomfortable and unhappy in his party clothes, moved across the room to Mrs. How-

land's dressing table. He had noticed that three of the drawers were partly open, and that this did not fit with the picture of primness which otherwise met the eye.

He took a handkerchief from the tail pocket of his dress coat and used it carefully, thinking there might be fingerprints on the drawer pulls. His eyes were sharp with a quickened interest as he noticed that the contents of the drawers had a tumbled, rummaged look. Then he moved on toward the open door of the clothes closet.

Doctor Hamlin now had other remarks to offer. He said: "There's a scalp wound; that accounts for the blood. But there doesn't seem to be any fracture. May have been a concussion. At this man's age that might prove fatal. A man's arteries are very brittle at—" The doctor looked at the butler. "How old was Mr. Howland?"

Barrows slid a nervous tongue out across his lips. "Sixty-three, I think, and he wasn't in the best of health, if I may be permitted to say so, sir. Only yesterday morning he had an attack and called in Doctor Belding."

"What kind of an attack?" cut in the police medical examiner.

"It was his heart," replied Barrows. "Mr. Howland had violated his diet. Gastritis, Doctor Belding said it was."

The medical examiner looked into the dead man's face, let his eyes skip across the floor to the hot-water radiator against the wall. His gaze became fixed on the metal section at the extreme end. Then he reached out his hand and touched the tip of his finger to the spot where the color, varnished a mahogany-brown to match the bedroom's furnishings, wasn't right. That spot was moist and sticky.

"Well, Sergeant Lane," he said

briskly, getting to his feet, "it all seems very simple and not very exciting. Howland had another heart attack—a pretty severe one this time—and he fell, striking the back of his head against the last section of the radiator, where, if you care to look, you will find a small splash of blood.

"The blow may or may not have been a contributing factor, but his bad heart—that's what killed him. Look at his face. See how the blood is congested. The staring eyes, his hands at his throat—all the signs of strangulation; a strangled heart in this case. He probably just ate his dinner; if so, that's what brought it on."

Old Barrows was almost trembling in his relief.

"Yes, sir," he said eagerly, "that must have been the way it was. Mr. Howland was at dinner when his wife telephoned from New York. She was greatly upset about something and sent him upstairs here to her room."

Doctor Hamlin's head jerked in a nod. "The climb upstairs didn't do the old fellow's heart any good, either. Well, Sergeant Lane, there's your murder case all blown to hell."

Kirby Lane backed out of the clothes closet. His face was grim under the overhead electric light.

"It's not quite so simple as that, doc," he said softly. "Come over here and take a look!"

The police medical examiner needed only one broad stride to reach the closet door and peer over the detective's shoulder. The first thing he noticed was the odor—an almost sickening overabundance of perfume.

"You said 'look,'" he grunted, "but maybe you must 'smell.' What's the idea?"

Kirby Lane reached his hand in-

side the closet and pushed open a path through the profusion of feminine finery so the doctor could get a better view of the small wall safe. Then he pointed down to the floor, where half a dozen jewel boxes had been tossed—empty.

"Cleaned out," he said tersely. "The safe has been looted."

Doctor Hamlin's eyes went wide and round as he clucked his tongue against the roof of his mouth.

"Yes, Kirby," he answered, "that might make everything different. I didn't think that hole in Howland's scalp could have killed a man, but I might be wrong. Perhaps there should be an autopsy to make absolutely sure.

"Say, I've got an idea! This job may be the work of the *Raffles* chap you cops have been trying to get a line on!"

Kirby Lane smiled wryly as his head jerked in a nod. "I beat you to that one by a couple of minutes, doc."

He swung out into the center of the room and crooked his finger toward Barrows, but the old butler, his face very white, and the corners of his mouth drawn tight, was looking at the floor.

"You!" snapped Kirby Lane.

Barrows forced his gaze to meet the detective's eyes.

"Was there much stuff kept in this tricky little safe, hidden away in the closet?" Lane demanded.

Barrows wet his lips. "Mrs. Howland kept her jewelry in it, sir. I should think the amount would run into quite a handsome figure—a good many thousands of dollars. She—she was always careful about keeping it locked."

After that the detective wanted to know about the telephone call

from Mrs. Howland which had sent her husband upstairs to his death, and Barrows told what little he knew of the incident. He explained that Mrs. Howland hadn't told him why she had so urgently wanted her husband to go into her room.

The questions went on. Had Barrows heard an outcry? Who were the members of the family, and how many of them were in the house tonight? Could he remember having seen any strangers lurking about?

In the midst of the interrogation, there was a startling interruption. Downstairs a door slammed open, there was the crash of an overturned piece of furniture in the lower hall.

"Barrows!" A hoarse, frightened voice was raised in a scream of pain. "Where are you—anybody? Get me a doctor; I've gotta have a doctor. I'm hurt; I'm hurt—bad!"

Trooper Blindloss, being nearest to the door, was the first to reach the head of the stairs. He saw a man with a bloodied head clinging weakly to the newel post of the stairway rail.

Before Blindloss could get down to him, the fellow's knees buckled up under his sagging body, and pitched him limply across the bottom steps.

"There's a guy down here and he looks like he was hurt plenty!" shouted the State trooper, as he went pounding down the stairs. The others were close behind.

"It's Travis!" cried Barrows, as Blindloss dragged the injured man up by the shoulders and lifted his face to the light.

"And who may Travis be?" snapped Kirby Lane.

The butler swallowed with a gulping sound. "He's Mr. Howland's chauffeur, sir."

Doctor Hamlin got his physician's kit and took charge. After stopping the flow of blood from a nasty gash across the scalp, he applied a restorative, and Travis groggily opened his eyes. The instant that happened, Kirby Lane pushed forward and leaned over the fellow.

"Can you remember who clipped you, Travis?"

The chauffeur groaned in pain, but his eyes were clearing.

"Sure I can remember," he muttered, "and if I can ever get my mitts on that bird, I'll make him wish to Heaven he'd croaked me.

"I was in my room over the garage. I heard the doors roll open, and I thought it was Mr. Crutchfield coming back in his car. So I come down the steps to see if he wanted I should do anything for him.

"But it wasn't Mr. Crutchfield, see? It was some guy I'd never seen before. He was tryin' to swipe one of the cars, and I'd caught him at it. I wasn't gonna let no punk of a kid get away with anything like that, so I hops onto the running board just as he's startin' her to roll.

"But he grabs up something—the cranking iron I guess it was—cracks me over the head, and that's the last I remember until a couple of minutes ago, when I come to and found my nut split open like he'd used a meat cleaver on me."

"Just a kid, you say?" pressed Sergeant Kirby Lane.

"Yeah, just a kid. Maybe nineteen or twenty. I sort of had a feelin' I'd seen the young squirt before, but I can't seem to place him."

"Know the license number?" Kirby Lane demanded.

"Sure," replied Travis, and gave it to the detective from memory.

"That ought to make it fairly easy to catch up with him," said the detective, moving swiftly toward the telephone to call State police headquarters and ask for a general alarm to all radio cars, telling them to pick up the stolen machine, bearing New York license plates 3Y 64 67.

Old Ned Barrows listened, his face drawn and his eyes stricken. He knew it was Herbie who had knocked out Travis and stolen the car, and he knew that Herbie's hour of reckoning with the police was drawing near.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MOTIVE.

KIRBY LANE agreed with the medical examiner that an autopsy should be performed, and the sooner the better.

The undertaker's wagon was taking Harrison Howland's body away from the house, when on a sharp turn of the curving driveway, it narrowly missed collision with a taxi which was coming much too fast from the opposite direction.

There was a woman in the cab. It was Grace Howland, rushing back from New York, and she had elected to return home alone. A startled, bewildered expression widened her expressive eyes as she glimpsed the somber bulk of the grim vehicle flashing past.

"It must have been my imagination," she thought, and an instant later the taxi had halted before the entrance of the house.

Rushing up the brick steps onto the terrace, she found the wide door into the entrance hall standing open, and a strange man, his tall frame clad in extremely proper evening clothes, emerging from the library. Grace was bewildered to understand

who he was and what he was doing here.

Kirby Lane understood her confusion.

"Mrs. Howland?"

"Yes," said Grace. "You——"

"Sergeant Lane of the State police detective squad, Mrs. Howland."

He saw the woman's face go a dead white and a sudden throbbing in her smooth, soft throat.

"The police!" she gasped. "Why must the police——"

"Circumstances make a police investigation necessary," Kirby Lane told her. "Your husband was found dead in your room, with the wall safe in the closet open and a number of empty jewel boxes scattered about the floor. It has the appearance of burglary; this, plus the fact that your husband had a wound in the back of his head, and that some unknown person has taken flight in a car stolen out of the garage here on the premises——"

"It was a burglary! It was!" Grace Howland broke in quickly, her voice rising to a hysterical shrillness. "I had a feeling about it—a premonition. That—that's why I called my husband from New York; I—I asked him to go upstairs to my room and make sure I had locked the safe before I left the house."

"You were uncertain you *had* locked it?" Kirby Lane asked her.

"I couldn't remember! I can't remember now!" Grace Howland's words rushed on.

"And my husband went up there—and encountered the burglar! Isn't that what you're trying to tell me? I—I sent him to his death! Oh, how horrible, how utterly horrible!"

Sergeant Lane tried to pacify her.

"We know nothing for an abso-

lute certainty, Mrs. Howland, except that your husband is dead, and that there has been a burglary. A little later I will want you to give me an estimate of the loss and a description of the stolen pieces. Were they insured?"

Grace Howland moistened her lips. "Y-yes, I think perhaps they were; some of them anyhow." She suddenly seemed to think of something. "As I came up the driveway in a taxi, another car shot past. It looked—but it *couldn't* have been a hearse!"

Kirby Lane looked uncomfortable. "Yes, in a way you might call it that, Mrs. Howland; the technical name is an undertaker's wagon. The medical examiner has ordered the body removed for—um—well, for a more complete medical examination."

Grace Howland pressed the back of a slim hand across her mouth, as if to stifle a scream. For a moment she stared at the detective with horror-filled eyes.

"You mean—an autopsy? Oh, no, no! That's too awful. I—I forbid it!"

The reply to that protest did not come from Kirby Lane; it came, instead, from the library doorway—a harsh, mirthless laugh with implication and venom in it.

Byron Crutchfield stood there, his eyes blazing hotly. He no longer felt the need of any pretense in his feelings toward Grace Howland. The mask was completely off.

"So you don't want an autopsy! Well, I'm not surprised at that, Grace. I'd be opposed to it myself—if I were afraid to let the police discover what killed him!"

Both the woman and the detective swung around sharply. Grace was speechless, but Kirby Lane found it quite easy to be articulate.

"When any accusations are made, the police will make them, Mr. Crutchfield," he said coldly. "There is, up to now, no conclusive evidence that a murder has been committed by anybody."

"No conclusive evidence?" Byron Crutchfield's voice shook with the heat of his passion. "All right, listen to the things I've got to tell you. I could have told you this twenty minutes ago, but I've just begun to see into the truth of the whole damnable clever business. She's cunningly and deliberately murdered one of the finest men who ever lived, and I mean to see she gets what's coming to her!"

"No, I can't tell you exactly how the trick was worked, but the first thing you detectives look for, I believe, is motive. Well, I can put you straight on that part of it quickly enough!"

Grace caught at Kirby Lane's sleeve. "Don't pay any attention to his lies. He just wants to make me all the trouble he can. Byron Crutchfield hates me; he's always hated me! He thinks I cheated him of his chance to get his own hands on the Howland money."

Byron Crutchfield gave a choppy, brittle laugh.

"Sure; I've never had one damn bit of use for her," he told the detective. "I've always known her for just what she was—a scheming huzzy with her eye on the main chance. The main chance turned out to be Harrison Howland—and she wouldn't even play square with the man she married for his money. She couldn't wait until he died decently and naturally. She must eat her cake and have it.

"So what does she do? She starts running around with a cheap fifty-dollar-a-week four-flusher named Tony Calvert.

"Now we're getting down to the motive, Sergeant Lane! Don't take my word for it. Ask the Niblo Detective Agency if they hadn't been employed to get the goods on her—and she figured they had!"

"That's why she killed him, Lane. How? That's for you cops to figure out, but the pattern seems clear enough. She cleans out the wall safe in her bedroom to make it look like burglary, and sends that poor, unsuspecting old man into her damnable death trap—whatever it was.

"She's in New York when it happened—a perfect alibi. Murder by long distance telephone—who would suspect that? I've given you the pieces, now go ahead and fit them together. That's *your* job."

Grace Howland started beating her hands together in a frenzy.

"Lies!" she shrieked. "It's all lies!"

Kirby Lane was beginning to find the water a lot deeper and muddier than he had expected, and before he could quite decide how to handle this new angle, the telephone was ringing. Trooper Blindloss answered it.

"For you, sergeant," said Blindloss.

Lane welcomed the interruption. It gave him a chance to think for a moment.

State police headquarters was on the wire.

"Trooper Musgrave, sergeant," said a crisp voice. "Our highway patrol has just picked up that stolen car—about three miles the other side of Ferndale. The guy who's drivin' it has got a bullet hole in his leg, but he won't tell us where he got it. He's not much more than a kid. Where do you want him delivered?"

"I want him here just as fast as you can bring him," answered Lane, and, hanging up the telephone, made

a pass across his face with a rumpled handkerchief.

Trooper Blindloss caught his superior's eye and grinned.

"Looks like things are breaking pretty fast, eh, sergeant?"

"Yeah," growled Kirby Lane; "too damn fast for an ordinary guy like me to keep up with 'em. The kid they've picked up in the car has got a bullet in him."

At that same instant he happened to catch a glimpse of old Ned Barrows through the library doorway, and wondered absently why the butler had suddenly turned as white as death.

CHAPTER IX.

NO BURGLARY!

IT seemed to take the State police a long time. Waiting for the highway patrol to bring the boy with the wounded leg, Kirby Lane had stripped off his tail coat, released his neck from the imprisonment of a high dress collar, and stepped outside for a breath of fresh air. Smoking a cigarette, the detective paced the brick terrace, tensely watching for a car to turn in from the public road.

Lane heard some one slipping up behind him. He turned swiftly and saw that it was old Barrows.

"Could—could I speak with you for a moment, sir?" quavered the butler. "It's about the boy—the prisoner you're waiting for, sir."

Kirby Lane's nerves were a little jumpy, his temper short.

"Well, what about him?" he demanded sharply.

"He—he's my grandson, sir," stammered Barrows.

"The hell you say! Why didn't

you tell me that an hour and a half ago?"

"I guess it's human nature to try to protect your own, Sergeant Lane, and he's really not to blame for what he did in the garage—hitting Travis on the head and making off with the car. I'd driven him half out of his mind. I lied to him, sir—as I thought for his own good. I made him believe that the policeman had died."

"Great Scott, what is all this?" roared Kirby Lane. "Now it's a policeman who's dead—or who isn't dead. Everybody in this cursed house seems to be nuts, and I guess I'll go cuckoo along with all the rest of you!"

Old Barrows put a trembling, beseeching hand on the detective's shirt-sleeved arm.

"I'm trying to explain, sir, as fast as I can. I tried to frighten the boy—and I guess I frightened him too much.

"You see, Sergeant Lane, Herbie had got into a scrape over on the Jersey side of the river. He was with another fellow who held up a filling station.

"Herbie claims he didn't have anything to do with it, and I—I think I believe him. But he was in the car when a New Jersey motor-cycle policeman tried to stop them. There—there was some shooting, and that's when Herbie got the bullet in his leg.

"By the time he'd got to me, the wound was giving him some trouble—infection. I hid him away upstairs in an attic room.

"The policeman, sir, wasn't very badly hurt; just a flesh wound, the papers said. But I thought a good scare would be a deep and lasting lesson to Herbie. As I've told you, I scared him too much.

"That's why he tried to get away, and——"

"And maybe killed old man Howland doing it!" growled Kirby Lane. "Also, some jewelry that can be hocked for cash comes in handy when a guy is trying to get away from the heat."

Barrows's face moved closer in the deep night shadows; his voice was sunk to a whisper as he said:

"I heard what Mr. Crutchfield told you, sir. There may be something in that. Mrs. Howland was having a love affair. A butler gets onto things; several times I heard her talking over the telephone. It wasn't the kind of talk you'd expect from a woman who loves her husband.

"But most important of all, Sergeant Kirby, there has been no burglary! If you'll step over here to the window, a little closer to the light, I will show the proof."

Lane followed the butler into the slice of light which filtered out onto the terrace from underneath an incompletely drawn window shade. Something glittered between Barrows's fingers, then rested in the cup of the detective's palm.

"And here are others, sir," whispered Barrows, "several of the more expensive pieces of Mrs. Howland's jewelry. I found them in this small bag, pinned to the underneath side of the valance of the window draperies in her room. A butler gets into the habit of noticing details, and I happened to——"

Before Barrows could finish, the detective silenced him with a gesture and hastily slipped the pieces of jewelry into his pocket. Grace Howland herself appeared in the entrance doorway, stood there for an instant, then moved out onto the terrace.

Kirby Lane walked over to her.

"Will you come back into the house with me, Mrs. Howland?" he said. "I'd like to speak with you for a few minutes?"

If the detective's voice had a sharper and grimmer edge than he meant it to have, Grace Howland did not notice.

"Yes, of course," she answered.

Lane took her into the library which at the moment was empty. He closed the door.

"I guess I'd better take a description of the stolen jewelry," he said. "It's the usual thing, you know, to notify the New York police, so they can check up on the pawnshops and the suspected receivers of stolen property."

Grace Howland sank down into a chair.

"Everything except the few pieces I happened to wear when I went into town this morning," she told him. "It's quite a long list. Hadn't you better write it down?"

Kirby Lane found a sheet of paper, and started writing as she talked. It did, indeed, make a lengthy list. The detective read it back to her.

"You're sure all these articles were in the safe when you left the house a little after ten this morning, Mrs. Howland?"

"Quite sure, Mr. Lane. Only I can't be absolutely positive that I locked the safe."

Kirby Lane moved a little closer to her. His manner was no longer pleasant.

"You seem to have a most unreliable memory, Mrs. Howland. If you will think quite carefully, I'm sure you'll be able to recall that you took the jewelry out of the safe, put it in a small cloth bag, and pinned the bag to the curtain valance in your room."

Grace Howland strained forward,

then sagged limply back into the chair. For an instant Kirby Lane was afraid he had a fainting woman on his hands, but her eyes flashed open again, stared at him with a trapped, desperate stare.

"And this," the detective told her, "puts you in a spot where you've got some explaining to do. Why did you fake a burglary, Mrs. Howland?"

Grace gasped for breath, wringing her hands.

"I'll tell you. I'll tell you the truth about that!" she whispered. "I had to raise some money; I had to raise it quickly—fifteen thousand dollars. I was being blackmailed."

Her words stopped for an instant, then continued to pour from her lips as she told Sergeant Lane about Luke Stauffer, the crooked private detective, who had threatened her with exposure to her husband.

"That's why I stayed over in New York for dinner to-night," she rushed on frantically; "that's why I telephoned my husband. It was Stauffer's idea. Stauffer thought it would look more convincing if my husband himself personally discovered the—the robbery."

Outside the house there was the sound of a car arriving. Kirby Lane took it for granted that it was the police car, bringing Herbie Sloan.

Sloan could wait. He had Grace Howland off balance and wanted to make full use of the psychological advantage. But he was at a distinct disadvantage, too, of not knowing what had actually caused Harrison Howland's death. It became difficult to accuse the woman of murder, without being actually certain a murder had been done.

"It was Stauffer's idea," Grace Howland had just told him; that kept crowding into the forefront of

his mind. Apparently this Stauffer was a slimy, clever fellow; perhaps clever enough to commit murder by medium of long-distance telephone.

"That'll be the rotten kernel in the nut," Kirby Lane told himself; "play the one against the other—that's the way to do it. Why the devil doesn't the doc hurry up and find out what old Howland died of?"

The closed door of the library swung open, and Kirby Lane could hardly believe his eyes to see that, instead of it being an officer of the highway patrol delivering the butler's grandson, it was Doctor Hamlin's face that peered in at him.

The medical examiner had brought with him a manner of suppressed excitement. He motioned to Kirby Lane.

"I think you'd better talk to me right away," he said.

"Discover something?" demanded Lane.

"You bet it's something!"

The detective of State police went out into the hall. Doctor Hamlin caught at the sleeve of Lane's dress shirt and pulled him toward the stairs.

"It's murder, all right," the doctor said softly, "but the proper place for you to hear my report is where the murder happened. Maybe it will make some sense, looking at it from there."

The two men went up the steps and into Grace Howland's bedroom.

"Harrison Howland was killed with cyanide," said the medical examiner.

Lane stared. "You mean—poisoned?"

"What else could I mean?" retorted the doctor. "A man doesn't die from cyanide by getting hit over the head with it." He strode across

the room. "I think perhaps I've got a lead for you—a point of beginning, anyhow."

Lane watched Hamlin go to the door of the closet and gesture inside.

"Your answer ought to be in there," he said. "Smell the spilled perfume? That's no accident, Lane. It was doused around in extremely liberal quantities for a deliberate purpose."

"Our murderer knew that cyanide has a distinctive odor which lingers long after the deadly potency of the poison itself has evaporated. Any medical man worth his salt would get just one whiff of the smell of bitter almonds and he'd have the right answer."

"I caught it almost instantly when I made my secondary examination at the undertaker's. After that, all the symptoms of cyanide poisoning stuck out like a sore thumb: the contortion of the face, rigidity of muscles, dilation of the eye pupils."

Kirby Lane found it difficult to throw off his bewilderment.

"So now it's a poisoning case!" he muttered.

"And a highly unusual one," replied Doctor Hamlin. "You're going to find it was worked out in a damn clever way. Harrison Howland *inhaled* the poison."

"As you perhaps already know, under certain conditions, cyanide gives off a deadly gas; the technical name of that gas is cyanogen. It's sometimes used by professional fumigators, but so many people have been accidentally killed by the fumes getting into the wrong apartments that the boards of health in most cities have forbidden it."

"Why, Lane, the stuff is so penetrating that it has been known to seep through brick walls!"

Kirby Lane stood in silence for a moment, letting all these details soak in. He remembered again what Grace Howland had said of the fake burglary. "It was Stauffer's idea."

"A lot of it's clear, anyhow," he muttered. "The pieces are beginning to fit, and the picture puzzle spells out Howland's wife."

"The burglary was a fake," continued Lane. "She cleaned out the safe herself and cached the stuff. The old man was having her watched by a detective agency; a crooked shamus by the name of Stauffer was going to splash her with plenty of dirt if she didn't come across with some quick money."

"The murder probably was planned as an afterthought, maybe the fear that Howland wouldn't fall for the phony robbery. Anyhow, it got rid of the old boy."

"I suspect Stauffer engineered tonight's business. The woman isn't smart enough to have thought up such a scheme by herself. The way it worked, of course, was for her to telephone her husband and get him to come up into this room."

"And into the closet," broke in Doctor Hamlin. "The cyanogen fumes would be more deadly in this small space. He got a whiff of it, and staggered back into the room, fell, and struck his head against the radiator. There's your picture, Lane. And maybe it won't be so difficult to solve as it sounds. This plot calls for some kind of a mechanical device that released the gas when Howland opened the closet door. The job is to find that device."

Grimly Kirby Lane moved within the closet.

"We're going to clean it out, piece at a time, until we *do* find it!" he said tensely.

Midway in the search, the detec-

tive stooped down to the closet floor and picked up something—an apparently trivial and inconsequential thing which it seemed impossible could have any connection with murder.

It was a thin piece of rubber, made in the form of a sack. Kirby Lane, overlooking nothing, held it in his hand, stretched it slightly between his fingers.

"What's that?" asked the medical examiner.

"A busted toy balloon—one of the sausage-shaped kind," answered the detective. "It can't amount to anything."

He tossed it aside and went on with his search, but when the closet had been stripped almost bare, without the discovery of some cunningly concealed device which had strangled the life out of a man's heart with two or three intakes of his breath, Lane kept thinking of that toy balloon. He picked it up again, stretched the harmless-looking thing back and forth between his fingers.

"Doc," Kirby Lane said slowly, his eyes beginning to gleam, "I think I've got it!"

CHAPTER X.

JUST A TOY.

DAWN had come, and breakfast had been served in the Howland house without Kirby Lane's having made an arrest. Grace Howland came into the dining room a little after nine, looking sleepless and haggard.

In the doorway she paused uncertainly as she saw that Byron Crutchfield had preceded her. After this moment of hesitation, she seemed to decide that to retreat would be an admission that she was afraid of him. She moved on into the room and took her usual place at the table.

Byron gave her a look of bitter hatred.

"I've had a good many unusual experiences, here and there," he said venomously, "but this is the first time I have ever had breakfast with a murderess."

Grace Howland clenched her hands, but made no reply.

Old Barrows came in from the butler's pantry. He had lost his harassed and haunted look, and the reason for the change was that his grandson was resting quietly on the third floor, with nothing more to fear from the police.

Kirby Lane had fixed that up. A telephone call over to New Jersey had resulted in unexpectedly good news. Pinky had tried another gas-station holdup the night before last and hadn't got away the second time. With a surprising magnanimity, he had cleared Herbie of any blame in the other crime.

The only thing the Jersey cops wanted Herbie for was as a witness perhaps, when Pinky was brought to trial.

"Toast and coffee," Grace Howland told Barrows.

Byron Crutchfield sneered across the width of the table at her. "So you really think you're getting away with it? Well, don't be too sure about that, Grace; not too sure. Perhaps this detective chap isn't quite so dumb as he looks!"

"Murderers should never be too sure; but that's the mistake that most of them make." The voice from the terrace was Kirby Lane's and he came in through the French windows with a small package under his arm. Doctor Hamlin, the medical examiner, followed him.

Lane had evidently made a flying trip home during the early hours of

the dawn, for he had got rid of his dress suit and was now wearing gray tweeds. He and the doctor sat down at the table. The detective was smiling, but the upward curve of his mouth was rather grim.

"No," he repeated, "murderers shouldn't be too sure." His hand slid to his pocket and drew forth an envelope. "Not even when they use cunningly simple devices like this to do their killing with."

He opened up the envelope and dropped the deflated rubber balloon on to the tablecloth.

"Innocent-looking thing, isn't it? A toy for small children, favors for New Year's Eve parties; just that."

He looked at Grace Howland; she seemed to be holding her breath. His glance moved over to Byron Crutchfield; the latter's face wore a puzzled, questioning look.

"You must be joking," said Crutchfield.

"No; not at all," answered Kirby Lane. "This toy balloon was what killed Mr. Howland. You see, when it was inflated, it became a deadly thing, for it was filled with a deadly gas. The name of the gas is cyanogen."

Grace Howland's eyes had a transfixed, fearful stare.

"But how—how could it be set off at the right moment?" blurted Crutchfield. "How could anybody be sure that it would be punctured at the right time?"

The detective nodded. "I'm getting to that, Mr. Crutchfield. The answer was the closet in Mrs. Howland's bedroom; the closet with the wall safe in it.

"There is an arrangement by which, when the door is opened, an automatic switch is snapped on, and a light above the door flashes on.

DS—8

When the door is closed, the light snaps off again.

"This proved very convenient. The toy balloon, inflated with the deadly cyanogen, was placed up near the ceiling with one end of it resting on the top of the electric-light bulb.

"So long as the door remained closed and the light bulb was cold, nothing happened. But when Mrs. Howland's telephone call sent her husband upstairs to see if her jewels were intact, the man was doomed.

"He opened the door. The light bulb was a very large one and heated quickly. The heat quickly melted the thin rubber of the balloon, and it exploded.

"That, I think, explains how Mr. Howland's death was accomplished."

Byron Crutchfield looked toward Grace Howland with vindictive gloating. "So that's the way she did it!" he exclaimed. "How damnably clever!"

"Even cleverer, in a way," responded Sergeant Lane. "Cyanogen is dangerous stuff to handle. You'd think a special laboratory equipment would be necessary to get the stuff inside a rubber sack. That had us stumped for a while, but now I can explain.

Kirby Lane was removing the paper from his small package. As it came off there was revealed a metal electric vaporizer, such as almost any drug store sells for the vapor treatment of colds, bronchitis and asthma.

At sight of it, Byron Crutchfield's expression of gloating was lost in a look of terror that distorted his features almost beyond recognition.

"I don't wonder you're a little upset, Mr. Crutchfield," said Sergeant Lane. "Yes, it's the vaporizer we found in your room. When we rushed it to the doctor's private

laboratory and got a positive reaction from the cyanogen test, we knew our murderer. You cleaned the container—but neglected the spout.

"Cyanide crystals in the vaporizer. The heating element reduced the crystals to a gas, and the heat forced this gas into the toy balloon which you had fastened tightly to the end of the spout. Your instrument of death was ready, only I suspect——"

Byron Crutchfield had half risen out of his chair, beads of perspiration popped out all over his face. Then he sank back weakly, knowing he was done for.

"I didn't mean to kill Mr. Howland!" he burst out hoarsely. He pointed a trembling forefinger at Grace. "I meant it for her. How was I to know that she would pretend a burglary and telephone from New York to get the old man to go

chasing upstairs and open the door of that closet. I thought——" He choked.

"You thought Mrs. Howland would be the first person to open the closet door," said Kirby Lane. "Yes, that's what I rather suspected."

Grace Howland fell across the table, sobbing wildly in her relief.

"You win, damn you!" Byron Crutchfield snarled at her. "The money was what you wanted, and I've helped you get it. What a joke that is on me!"

Old Barrows, listening through a crack in the door of the butler's pantry, remembered what Harrison Howland had said a few minutes before he had gone to his death.

"Let them have the money," was what Howland had said; "maybe it'll not make them as happy as they think."

Barrows didn't believe it would.

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Statement of the Ownership, Management, etc., required by the Acts of Congress of August 24, 1912, and March 3, 1933, of Street & Smith's Detective Story Magazine, published monthly, at New York, N. Y., for October 1, 1937.

State of New York, County of New York (ss.)

Before me, a Notary Public, in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared H. W. Ralston, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is Vice President of Street & Smith Publications, Inc., publishers of Street & Smith's Detective Story Magazine, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, as amended by the Act of March 3, 1933, embodied in section 537, Postal Laws and Regulations, to wit:

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Sworn to and subscribed before me this 30th day of September, 1937. De Witt C. Van Valkenburgh, Notary Public No. 16, New York County. (My commission expires March 30, 1938.)

HEADQUARTERS CHAT

PSYCHOLOGISTS tell us that human behavior is governed by certain mental factors. Those factors are the same in the criminal and the law-abiding. Joy, sorrow, disappointment, pain, pleasure, success, failure, are experienced just as keenly by the former as the latter class. The difference lies in the fact that the criminal is a person unable to govern or control these emotions. Thus we have the thief—commonest of the genus criminal—helping himself to whatever he wants, regardless of rightful ownership. With the murderer we find greed the most frequent motivation.

If you have read "Hatred House," the novelette by Walter Ripperger in this issue, you met greed in its most hideous form. Brother against brother and sister, husband against wife, doctor against patient: all eager to garner riches for himself alone. But more important, you met Captain Ephraim Toll, an honest, efficient officer of the law; a man who refuses to be the dupe of a dishonest district attorney; a man who cannot be bought.

Do you believe that crime catches up with us? Is there a law of compensation? Do the mills of God grind with exactness for all? Walter Ripperger evidently has such a belief or he couldn't have written "Murder on Maracaibo Street," a novelette in Clues-Detective Magazine for November.

You see, we liked Captain Toll's bluff honest methods of detection so much that we asked Mr. Ripperger to carry on with him. In the December issue of Detective Story Magazine you will again find Captain Toll serving the ends of Justice in a novelette called "Six-toed Killer," by Walter Ripperger.

But we want to tell you about the Ripperger story in Clues-Detective, "Murder on Maracaibo Street," just in case you don't happen to be a regular reader of that magazine and might miss it. You will meet face to face a man of prominence—a judge of standing and ability—but a man with whom family pride and name are a fetish; a man who stops at nothing to maintain his apparent position, yet his life is a veritable fiction. Again Captain Toll is fighting District Attorney Heinemann, a man who has a price; again, like a *deus ex machina*, Captain Toll saves an innocent man from a murder charge and thus serves the ends of Justice.

If you liked the fighting captain, remember you will find him on a case in Clues-Detective Magazine for November, and still undefeated he works on in Detective Story Magazine for December.

APICKPOCKET is usually conceded to be about the lowest of all crooks. We insist that it takes a mighty clever author to create a member of the nimble-fingered gentry into a character for whom the reader has sympathy. Usually we want to see the crook get his "just deserts." But with "Thubway Tham" we've got to admit we'd rather hate to see the little fellow take that "trip up the river" that Craddock has been promising him for so long. Yes, Tham is a mighty clever little chap; so clever that he has put one over on us and slipped into Clues-Detective Magazine. In the November issue you'll find

THUBWAY THAM—MODEL

BY JOHNSTON McCULLEY

Yeth thir! Tham wath juth the type!

The MARCH

FOR YOUR DICTIONARY OF CRIME: Larceny is another name for theft. There are two kinds of larceny: Petty and grand. In most States any theft under a fifty-dollar valuation constitutes petty larceny and is punishable by a jail sentence.

DRUNK—NOT DRUNK: That is the question, if an automobile driver has imbibed freely in 3.2 per cent beer, generally conceded by law to be a nonintoxicating beverage. "Not drunk" is the contention of Attorney John Madden, Jr., defending a truck driver in the Kansas courts, who figured in a collision. Witnesses testified that the defendant had drunk nothing stronger than 3.2. "Drunk" insisted the judge, and indications are that it will be up to the supreme court to make a ruling.

AN ITALIAN PLATINUM BLOND: Or the story of a horse that changed its spots. After giving up hope of recovering a horse that had been stolen from him, Mario Conterio, a peasant, who lives just outside Domodossola, Italy, bought another. The stolen horse was black, but Mario, not averse to a change of color, bought a white one. Strangely enough, the new horse seemed very much at home in Mario's stables. Puzzled, Mario investigated and found he had purchased a black horse bleached blond—and his own animal.

CRIME FLOURISHES: Because, declares Director J. Edgar Hoover of the Federal bureau of investigation, there are too few policemen. His conclusion is based on figures from a survey of 93 cities. In cities employing 2.3 policemen per 1,000 inhabitants, there were five murders for every 100,000 persons. In cities employing less than one policeman per 1,000 residents, the homicide rate was twice as great. Likewise the cities with a low ratio of policemen showed 67 per cent more robberies; 63 per cent more aggravated assaults, and 44 per cent more burglaries and thefts.

ADD TO YOUR COLLECTION OF CRIME ODDITIES: Should you want a hair cut or shave in Boston, you have no way of knowing what the price will be, other than asking inside the barber shop. To hang a sign announcing prices so as to be seen from the street is violation of a Massachusetts State law.

YOU MAY BEAT YOUR WIFE: At least in Hamilton, Ontario, where a judge recently ruled that the old English common law still holds good there. By that law a man has the right to chastise or confine his wife under certain circumstances.

of CRIME

WHIPPING POST IN VOGUE: Prior to starting his term of ten years in the New Castle, Delaware County, workhouse, a prisoner was lashed forty times across his bare back. The lash was a cat-o'-nine tails in the hands of Warden Elwood H. Wilson. The prisoner was shackled to a post, and the warden stood at arm's length and wielded the lash. Two other men were whipped, but received fewer lashes. One prisoner, serving two months for larceny, received ten lashes; another, convicted of a similar charge, suffered but five strokes.

COMING AND GOING: Sing Sing is now photographing all prisoners upon their discharge from prison. Many men serve such long sentences and change so in appearance during their time in prison, that the pictures taken upon their entry are practically valueless. These last-minute photographs provide the police with a positive means of identification.

RECORD ALIASES: State Correction Commissioner Edward P. Mulrooney has ordered all New York prisons to make a record of all aliases and nicknames of convicts. The commissioner believes that such a record will be an effective means of tracking down criminals.

WOMEN EMBEZZLERS: The case histories of four hundred women embezzlers show them to have been motivated by wholly unselfish reasons; usually the provision of better living conditions for their families. The typical woman embezzler has nothing in common with the "gun moll" or woman of shady character. She is a good worker, is fairly intelligent, and respected by her neighbors. She does not drink, gamble, or "step out." Usually her first peculation is the result of an emergency.

TOUGH PRISON: On Alcatraz Island—a twelve-acre outcropping of sheer rock—is situated the Federal prison for incorrigibles. No man is ever sentenced to Alcatraz; he must earn his way by being a trouble maker in some other prison to which he has been sentenced directly. The warden says that while they have had many "tough customers" there, they always manage to whittle them down. Only one prisoner ever attempted to escape since the department of justice took over the prison from the army, and he was killed. Punishment, not reformation, is the code.

CHILDREN OF PROHIBITION: According to a survey presented to the National Conference of State Liquor Administrators, Americans whose youth endured for the period embraced by the Eighteenth Amendment drink little themselves and in general disapprove of excessive indulgence in spiritous liquors.



THE TRASH CAN BELCHED LEAPING FLAMES AND BLACK SMOKE.

THUBWAY THAM'S HOT WALLET

BY JOHNSTON McCULLEY

Author of "The Return of Thubway Tham," etc.

THERE was ire in the face of Detective Craddock that afternoon as he paced with determined stride along the street, elbowing a path for himself with little regard for the rights of others. This was contrary to Craddock's nature. Usually he was the soul of courtesy, save when dealing with a known malefactor who had transgressed against laws and ordinances.

Detective Craddock was annoyed. It always upset him to have his immediate superior call him into the office, offer him a chair and a cigar, and then pace back and forth, glowering, the while blistering words fell from his lips anent the professional faults and shortcomings of some of the staff, Detective Craddock in particular.

Craddock recently had come from such a session, and his face was still

red, in a manner of speaking, because of some of the things his immediate superior had said. To make the thing worse, Craddock knew that some of the criticism was justified.

At this hour, Craddock knew, "Thubway Tham," his friend-enemy, would be sunning himself in Madison Square on a bench, while watching the pigeons and sparrows fight for scraps of food. It was a habit of Tham's, the prelude to a descent into the subway and a criminal attack on the pockets and wallets of the careless citizenry.

Tham was there, as Craddock had expected. The little dip glanced up and grinned, as Craddock came to a stop at the end of the bench, and stood with arms akimbo glowering down malignantly.

"Well, well," Thubway Tham said. "What theemth to be the matter with you, Craddock, thith fine afternoon? Your fathe lookth like a thunder-thtorm comin' down the Hudthton. It ith black like a cloud and the lightnin' flameth in your eyeth. Whatever it ith, Craddock, maybe you are takin' it too theriously. Our troubleth are never tho big ath we make 'em out. It ith alwayth dark-etht jutht before dawn. Every cloud hath a thilver linin'. A rollin' thtone gatherth no moth. A bird in the hand ith worth——"

"Shut up!" Detective Craddock interrupted, and sat down on the bench.

"My goodneth, how you thtorm!" Thubway Tham complained. "You look like a man who hath been crothed in love. Ith that it, Craddock? Ith the girl friend givin' you the run-around? Hath a richer and handthomer man come to town on a vithit, and ith he turnin' the little lady'th head?"

"Shut up!" Craddock said, again.

"You won't talk yourself out of this, Tham. You listen to me!"

"I can do that with my earth thtopped up," Tham replied. "Pleathe lower your voithe, Craddock. You are thcarin' the thpar-rowth."

"I'm sick and tired of being bawled out by my captain on your account, Tham. I was on the carpet this morning. Reports and howls and kicks from citizens having their pockets picked in the subway! You know what the cap told me?"

"No, thir!"

"He told me that a certain Thubway Tham was responsible for a lot of it. He informed me that he knew I knew you well and should be acquainted with your professional habits. 'Why don't you bring in that little so-and-so, Craddock?' he asked me. 'Is it beyond you, or is he a particular friend of yours?'"

"Well, Craddock, be that ath it may, you are a friend of mine, not so?"

"Not so!" Craddock said. "But I'll be square about it, Tham. I'm warning you. Friendship ceases. I'm out to get you now by fair means or foul. I've even agreed to resort to a trick to land you with the goods and send you to the Big House up the river for a long stretch. I'll be sorry about it, Tham, but I have a duty to perform."

"How you do run on, Craddock!"

"I'm decent enough to give you a warning, Tham. You and other dips are pretty smart. You lift a leather, extract the currency—which is hard to identify—then ditch the leather, and grin. The empty wallet is found in some trash can or the gutter and it——"

"Thith ith motht interethtin'," Tham interrupted.

"And some wise bird down at headquarters has perfected a plan to up-

set all the old routine, Tham. I'm warning you that you're going to be caught if you persist in handling wallets which do not belong to you. Right here and now, Tham, you'd better turn honest and get a job. I'll even help you get one."

"I'll make a deal with you, Craddock," Tham said earnestly.

"What is it, Tham?"

"I don't think a lot of the way I live, and I don't think a lot of your life work, either, Craddock. Thuppothe we both turn honeth. I'll thtop breakin' the law, and get me a job ath a thoda jerker or thome-thin'—"

"That'll be fine, Tham!"

"And you thtop takin' money under falth pretentheth for bein' a cop, and get yourthelf an honeth job drivin' a truck. Ith it a deal?"

Detective Craddock sputtered, growled angrily, and got to his heavy feet.

"All right!" he barked. "All right! I've warned you, Tham. May the consequences be on your own head!"

Craddock wandered away, but Thubway Tham knew the detective would loiter in the vicinity and make an effort to tail Tham when he left the bench. That did not worry Tham much, for it had happened often before with no sad results. What worried Tham was the hint Craddock had dropped about some trick to trap pickpockets.

He would have to be doubly alert, Tham decided. Perhaps it would be wise not to "work" to-day. But, as was usually the case, Tham needed funds. He had been playing poker again, which accounted for it. As a poker player, Tham was an excellent pickpocket.

In time, he arose from the bench, stretched and yawned, tugged at his cap, and sauntered into Fifth Avenue

like a man without a care in the world. He did not look around for Craddock. He supposed the detective was tailing him, or had assigned another to do it. Time enough to try to discover the "tail" when he was ready to follow his profession.

It was almost five by the clock when Tham came to the subway entrance at Times Square. He became alert now. He did not see Craddock, or any other officer of his acquaintance, but that did not mean they were not in the vicinity. Thubway Tham never made the mistake of underestimating Craddock's cleverness.

Tham descended the stairs and went out upon the crowded platform. Contrary to his usual method, he caught an uptown local, sat in a corner of the car, and seemed half asleep as the train rattled from station to station and made its scheduled stops.

Nobody in the car looked suspicious to Tham. He arose, yawned, and left the train at Seventy-second Street. Up on the street he stood at the curb watching passers-by from beneath drooping eyelids.

He did not see Craddock. Nor did anybody seem to have particular interest in him. And the only person who attracted Thubway Tham's interest was a portly man of middle age who acted flustered about something, and muttered to himself as he stood at the curb searching through his pockets evidently for something he had misplaced.

The portly one emptied pocket after pocket, glanced at what he brought forth, returned it. From a hip pocket, he took a wallet, opened it, and gave a sigh of satisfaction as he found in it a folded document of some sort. He thrust the document into the breast pocket of his

coat and returned the wallet to the hip pocket of his trousers.

Thubway Tham was standing so near, and the portly man held the wallet so low as he made his search, that Tham had a quick glimpse of the contents. A quantity of currency was in that wallet, and Tham needed funds.

He looked around swiftly to see if anybody were watching him and perhaps had observed his interest in the portly man. But everybody looked innocent. So Tham followed the man with the wallet down the steps to the subway platform, which was fairly crowded, now that people were coming uptown from shopping, matinees, and business.

"Maybe thith ith a plant, and maybe it ith not," Thubway Tham muttered to himself. "We thall see."

He got close to the portly one and waited. An uptown express roared in; men and women struggled to get off, and Tham's prospective victim waited to get on. Tham followed him into a car, where they clung to straps.

The train rushed on northward. Tham glanced at passengers near him. Each seemed occupied with his or her own affairs. Tham began a maneuver to get closer to the man with the wallet, but the aisle was crowded and Tham could not make much progress without attracting unwelcome attention to himself.

At Ninety-sixth Street, the man with the wallet left the train, and Tham growled imprecations and followed. As an usual thing, Tham did not lift a leather on the street, but now necessity compelled him.

The portly one certainly was a badly befuddled individual, Tham decided. He came to an abrupt stop as soon as he had quitted the subway, gestured wildly, muttered some

more, and turned to descend into the subway again.

Tham followed. The other had forgotten to attend to something downtown, Tham decided. Perhaps, on the congested train, Tham could do his work with little fear of detection. They were just in time to catch a downtown express.

Tham got into a car at the other's heels—and then he saw Craddock. The detective was at the end of the car, and evidently had just boarded the train. Tham glanced around rapidly and saw another officer he knew by sight—at the other end of the car.

"Tho!" Tham muttered. "Thith thertainly beginth to look like a trap."

He remembered again that Craddock had hinted at some new police scheme for trapping pickpockets. But this situation was looked upon by Tham as a sort of challenge. He did not believe the portly one was a party to the scheme, whatever it was. And he decided that the scheme of which Craddock evidently thought so much was only to have a detective at each end of the car, and possibly another near the center doors, so, at an alarm, Tham could be grabbed before having a chance to "ditch the leather."

"Tho!" Tham muttered again. "There ith nò thcheme on earth that can't be beaten."

Purposely, he pretended an interest in a man some distance down the aisle. He moved toward him slowly, and got beside the portly man. The express thundered on, and came to Times Square eventually.

This, Tham decided, would be a good place to do his work. The platform was jammed with people. There would be a mad scramble to get on and off the train. And the

man with the fat wallet was preparing to leave the car here.

So, as the doors slid open, Thubway Tham's nimble fingers did their work. He got the wallet, slipped it into his own coat pocket, ducked between two women and reached the platform. He heard a howl behind him and knew it came from the throat of Craddock.

But he was going rapidly through the jostling crowd on the platform now. Fighting to get to the trains, these homeward-bound men and women aided Thubway Tham immeasurably. He evaded Craddock easily, and hurried up to the street.

Following the usual method, Thubway Tham would now put his hand into his coat pocket, get the wallet open, remove its contents, tuck what currency it contained into a waistcoat pocket; then, as he walked briskly past a trash can, toss the empty wallet into it when nobody was looking. As long as the wallet remained in his possession, he was in danger. A sudden "pinch," a search, and the damning evidence would sent him up the river.

And Tham shivered whenever he thought of that possibility. In common with others, he loved freedom. To be incarcerated for a term behind stone walls, far from the rumbling of his beloved subway, away from his New York—Tham did not think he could long endure it.

He thrust his hand into his pocket and clutched the wallet, and his fingers began fumbling with it, opening it in the pocket, feeling for and taking out currency and nothing else. A peculiar expression came into Tham's face as he worked. He jerked his hand out of his pocket and examined it swiftly.

The wallet had felt queer. And now Tham's fingers felt queer. A thin gummy substance clung to

them. Tham realized with a flash of horror that the wallet had been coated thinly with that gummy substance.

A fingerprint trap! That was what it was. If he dropped that wallet into a trash can, and he was being followed, and the wallet was fished out of the can and examined, and his fingerprints found on it! Tham knew the answer to that one.

He had worked the currency out of the wallet before taking his hand from his pocket. Now he put his hand into his pocket again, got the currency and brought it forth. As he hurried toward the nearest corner, Tham examined the currency swiftly.

Fives and tens. Possibly it was marked cleverly, possibly not. If this was a police trap, then possibly yes.

Tham wasted no time. He stuffed the currency into the wallet again and made for a trash can on the corner. He had not decided just what to do.

Another gasp of horror came from him. Ahead of him he saw Craddock, advancing with purposeful stride. Across the street was another detective Tham knew. A quick glance behind showed him a third.

Tham saw the trap now. If they caught and searched him, they would find the wallet in his possession. If he tossed the wallet into the trash can, they would retrieve it, examine it, and silence any lie he might tell by revealing his fingerprints.

Panic rushed upon Tham, but he fought it off. The enemy was closing in slowly, deliberately, watching every move he made. Something like a sob came from Tham's throat—then he pulled himself together.

He must act swiftly and outwit the enemy, he thought. If he did not,

disaster would strike him. He would be Thubway Tham no longer, merely a human being with a number stamped on him. He would eat food he did not like, do work he disliked doing, be confined like a wild beast.

"It ith a dirty trick!" Tham muttered. "A whole polithe forthe pickin' on me!"

Tham had continued walking toward the trash can. He saw he would reach it before Craddock or the other officers could come up. But little good that did him. His fingerprints were on the chemical-coated wallet. No doubt the substance was such that a mere wiping with a handkerchief would not obliterate the prints.

Tham, only half conscious of the move, reached in his left coat pocket and got a cigarette. He popped it into his mouth nervously and snapped a match. Then, he knew!

He allowed the match to go out without lighting the cigarette. He quickened his stride and went on toward the trash can. Another match came out, just as he stopped beside the can.

Craddock and the other officers seemed in no hurry. Craddock had a half grin on his face as he approached. He wanted Tham to have time to toss the wallet into the trash can. He even looked across the street to give Tham the chance.

Tham took it. He jerked the wallet out of his pocket and threw it into the trash can. The top of the can was off, and Tham saw the can was filled with waste paper—news-papers, wrappings, empty cigarette packages.

And now Tham swiftly struck his match and lighted his cigarette. Deliberately he tossed the flaming match into the can. It lit among some tissue paper at the edge of the wallet.

There was a sputter of flame, a puff of smoke. The paper had caught. Tham puffed his cigarette and turned away. From the corner of his eye, he saw Craddock hurrying toward him, saw the detective motion to his brother officers.

The trash can belched leaping flames and black smoke. Whatever chemical had coated the wallet had fed the fire. People began shouting and pointing, and some of the curious crowded toward the spot.

Thubway Tham chuckled. The evidence was gone. Against all the testimony they could bring forth would stand the strong defense that no wallet could be exhibited to back up the officers' story. Knowing how careful Craddock was professionally, Tham knew he would not make an arrest under the circumstances. He would have to have more and better evidence.

Another horrible thought came to Tham. There was more evidence! That stuff which had coated the wallet was on his hands. It stuck like grime, like a mixture of graphite and grease. If they grabbed him now, with that stuff on his hands, they would have something to support their story.

"Hey, Tham!" he heard Craddock shout.

Tham glanced back and saw Craddock hurrying toward him. Another man was pounding forward from another direction. It was a moment for quick thinking.

Tham hurried down the walk with increased speed, and the solution came to him. He began running, and saw that his pursuers increased their speed also. Tham got out a small penknife—as he ran, and deliberately cut his left hand across the base of the thumb.

He dodged through the crowd and got around a corner, knowing that

Craddock and at least one other detective were only a short distance behind. But Tham knew where he was going, and for what.

A short distance from the corner was a drug store. Tham got into it before the enemy turned the corner. He went rapidly to the rear of the store, and stood at the end of the counter where he was masked by a display of merchandise from the street.

"A thmall bottle of turpentine, pleathe," he said to the clerk. "Quickly, pleathe! I have cut my hand."

He did not glance around to see whether Craddock and the other had entered or gone past. Not seeing Tham when they rounded the corner, the detectives would know he had darted through some doorway. And search would take a little time.

A little time was all Tham needed. The clerk came with the small bottle of turpentine. Tham paid him, clutched the bottle, and jerked out the cork. He poured turpentine into his right hand and washed his hands with the stuff. He took a second turpentine hand bath, and wiped his hands on his handkerchief.

"A freth handkerchief, pleathe," he said to the clerk.

The clerk got him one ready to use. While the clerk's back was turned, Tham tossed the handkerchief he had used into a dark space beneath the end of the counter. He wrapped the fresh handkerchief around his cut thumb.

No evidence now! Even his own handkerchief, stained with that greasy mixture, was gone. So Thubway Tham walked briskly to the door and stepped out into the street. He stopped at the curb and lighted a cigarette. Puffing in evident enjoyment, he started to saunter back to the corner.

"Tham!" Craddock shouted behind him.

Thubway Tham stopped, turned, registered surprise.

"Well, Craddock!" he cried. "Thith ith a thurprithe! Tho I thee your ugly fathe again!"

Craddock grasped him by an arm, and the other detective came hurrying up and grasped the other.

"What ith thith all about?" Tham demanded.

"We've got you, old boy!" Craddock said. "You grabbed a wrong wallet. It was a plant. And you tossed it into a trash can."

"Craddock, how dare you?"

"Shut up! And you tossed in a match and burned up everything in the can."

"How careleth of me," Tham said. "I am forever tothin' live matcheth into wathte bathketh at home. If there ith any damage, I thall be glad to pay it."

"Very clever!" Craddock said. "If you're so innocent, why did you run from us?"

"Run from you, Craddock? I wath not runnin' from anybody. I wath runnin' to that drug thtore."

"Why, if I may ask?"

"Oh, you may athk," said Tham. "I cut my hand with my penknife, while I wath thtartin' to trim the nail on my little finger. Thee the cut and blood? And I wath afraid, Craddock, of it gettin' infected. And I remembered, Craddock, that I had learned when I wath only a little boy that it ith good to pour turpentine on a cut. Tho I hurried to the drug thtore and got thome turpentine and bathed my hand in it."

Craddock looked at Tham's hands. Something like a groan escaped him.

"I see, Tham, I see," Craddock said. "Yes, Tham, turpentine isn't

a bad thing to put on a cut, if there's nothing else handy. I may remark, Tham, that painters and mechanics also use turpentine to remove paint and grease from the hands. Very clever, Tham!"

"Thir?"

"Out of my sight!" Craddock growled. "Away from me, before I forget I'm a sworn officer of the law! Away, before I take you apart!"

"My goodneth!" Tham gasped. "How you thtorm!"

Tham hurried away. Not that he

feared Craddock. But he did fear something else. It was his great fear that Craddock might remember the wallet had been in his pocket, and that perhaps some of the greases from it had adhered to that pocket's interior.

And Tham did not lose that fear entirely until he was in his own room, in the lodging house conducted by Mr. "Nosey" Moore, the retired burglar, and had carefully cleaned that pocket with certain materials he purchased at yet another drug store.

WHAT IS A HUNCH?

JUST what a hunch is is hard to define. Is it a telepathic communication from another mind that we pick up, or is it simply the result of a logical course of quick thinking backed up by experience? Often hunches play an important part in a policeman's or a detective's work. Sometimes their actions are spoken of as being a sixth sense. But what is a sixth sense but another form of hunch?

The origin of the word "hunch" is uncertain. The meaning which is mostly used is that of a strong urge to do a particular thing. It may come from an old gambler's superstition that to touch the hump of a hunchback would bring him good luck.

A New York detective saw a dapper young man talking to a known criminal on Broadway. The detective had a hunch that the young man should be accosted and questioned. It was possible, of course, that the stranger did not know he was talking to a criminal. That was the chance the detective had to take, but his hunch was still strong. Later, when the stranger walked up Broadway alone, the detective joined him and engaged him in conversaion. The replies to the detective's casual questions were evasive. The hunch grew stronger, this time being built up by something tangible. The stranger gave his name and said he was a clerk employed in that neighborhood. He was taken to the police station for further questioning, and it developed that the name was an alias and the man was a person wanted by the police for three years for questioning about a murder of a race-track man in Philadelphia. Fingerprints proved what a mere hunch had started.

That same week another detective had a hunch that a couple of men he noticed did not look just right, as he expressed it. Taking them to the station resulted in the capture of two others, all four being sought-for jewel thieves who had been robbing women in New York and various other Eastern cities.

Sometimes a hunch goes wrong, but if it is carefully analyzed it will be found that it was a case of faulty reasoning and not a hunch after all.

UNDER THE LAMP

BY GERARD HOLMES

If you like puzzles, won't you work on one of your own, send it in, and let the other fans wrestle with it? Answers to problems will always appear in the following issue. Address all letters relative to this department to Gerard Holmes, care of Street & Smith's Detective Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

WARNING: Do not forward money to any one who asks for it.

USEFUL TIPS

A cryptogram is written with a transposed alphabet. Approximate letter frequency: E A O I D H, etc. E is most frequent letter. A and I can stand alone. O seldom ends an English word. O E and Y only vowels that can end common two-letter words. Most words begin with consonants. A consonant is usually followed by a vowel. Middle letter of three-letter word is usually a vowel. Second and third from last are usually vowels. Watch for endings, ION, ING, and S.

PEPIGRAMS OF PATRISTOCRAT!

Here's a whole issue selected from the generous contributions of Patristocrat, Waltham, Massachusetts. If they do not pep you up we will miss our guess.

As usual, Midnight Oil is the most difficult. To solve the others a glance at "Useful Tips" should be sufficient.

1. Midnight Oil.

VESSIBUEPZIPH DEPZISB DGN BHLWI
LPZ BVSIIP LHHSLVH BE CLPN. USE-
XLXQN EP LVVEYPH EJ ZI-QOWGHB.

2.

LARD HYRIV BC HLEJVESM LB LAR
WIHL GIS-TNL WIQERH, ABU ITBNL
LAR WIHL ANHTISQ?

3.

OVER ERN EPIZZVM-AIHHNJ RVQROIBL
UX RUCVJIBL ERN LIFFIER IYYNIP
EU FN HUPN ERN JIB UZ IPPNLE.

4.

SOLD HEWITY VTEEA UYW VEYROWIYVI
 MUHIJ UYB JIUJEY ER LDI BIUT OJ
 MEEW RET U JQUB TOWI.

5.

BULK CHIVULM HB DEPAB NLPJZ TUJ
 NTB IN HZ IGXPLCCH. LFLP AEZQL
 BULK UHFL XLLZ CHIVUEZV HB NLJNCL
 DJP NIBBEZV BULG MJTZ AJGL NCHQL.

6.

SUM OLSIUTLWMEY PJHUS SP TLWM
 SUM UQHUMYS MLEVQVHY. SUMC LBB
 OPEW PRME SQTM.

7.

AMBOLAX NOGXM XRQEMB—UGF ULBZ
 EMHNIBMX UGB BLRXHRV UIB OLEM
 CMMH ULRQIBMX CMJLIXM NOM AICQRJ
 NORHPX NOMD LBM XPRH VLZMX.

*Answers to Puzzles in the
 October, 1937, Issue.*

1. Dyspeptic tycoon scolds employee, who quixotically accepts blame although innocent, thus shielding wealthy young scion from paternal wrath.

PUZZLE FANS' HONOR ROLL

Send in your answers to each issue's puzzles, ye fans, and watch for your name on our Honor Roll.

2. Awestruck infants watch dwarf cavort. Gaiety obvious. Elfin frolic halts abruptly.
3. Palatial palaces, abodes of monarchs; many palladiums scattered about with meticulous precision.
4. When our moon is at its syzygy almost all single people stare up at it and make love.
5. Beautiful Chicago! Some of its wonderful sights include the Shedd Aquarium, Art Institute, and Field Museum.
6. QUIET WOMAN.



"SELDOM SEE AN I. C. S. GRADUATE OUT OF A JOB"

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- ☐ Architectural Draftsman
- ☐ Building Estimating
- ☐ Contractor and Builder
- ☐ Structural Draftsman
- ☐ Structural Engineer
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- ☐ Electrical Engineer
- ☐ Electric Lighting
- ☐ Welding, Electric and Gas
- ☐ Reading Shop Blueprints
- ☐ Heat Treatment of Metals

- ☐ Sheet Metal Worker
- ☐ Boilermaker
- ☐ Telegraph Engineer
- ☐ Telephone Work ☐ Radio
- ☐ Mechanical Engineering
- ☐ Mechanical Draftsman
- ☐ Machinist ☐ Toolmaker
- ☐ Patternmaker
- ☐ Diesel Engines
- ☐ Aviation Engines
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- ☐ Plumbing ☐ Steam Fitting
- ☐ Heating ☐ Ventilation
- ☐ Air Conditioning
- ☐ Steam Engineer
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- ☐ R. R. Locomotive
- ☐ R. R. Section Foreman
- ☐ Air Brakes ☐ R. R. Signalmen
- ☐ Highway Engineering
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- ☐ Surveying and Mapping

- ☐ Bridge Engineer
- ☐ Bridge and Building Foreman
- ☐ Chemistry
- ☐ Pharmacy
- ☐ Coal Mining
- ☐ Mine Foreman ☐ Fire Boilers
- ☐ Navigation
- ☐ Cotton Manufacturing
- ☐ Woolen Manufacturing
- ☐ Agriculture
- ☐ Fruit Growing
- ☐ Poultry Farming

- ☐ Business Management
- ☐ Industrial Management
- ☐ Traffic Management
- ☐ Accountancy
- ☐ Cost Accountant
- ☐ O. P. Accountant

- ☐ Bookkeeping
- ☐ Secretarial Work
- ☐ Spanish
- ☐ French
- ☐ Salesmanship
- ☐ Advertising

- #### BUSINESS TRAINING COURSES
- ☐ Service Station Salesmanship
 - ☐ First Year College Subjects
 - ☐ Business Correspondence
 - ☐ Stenography and Typing
 - ☐ Civil Service ☐ Mail Carrier
 - ☐ Railway Mail Clerk

- ☐ Grade School Subjects
- ☐ High School Subjects
- ☐ College Preparatory
- ☐ Illustrating
- ☐ Cartooning
- ☐ Lettering Show Cards ☐ Signs

- #### DOMESTIC SCIENCE COURSES
- ☐ Home Dressmaking
 - ☐ Professional Dressmaking and Designing
 - ☐ Advanced Dressmaking

- ☐ Millinery
- ☐ Tea Room and Cafeteria Management, Catering
- ☐ Foods and Cookery

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Looks like a cigarette. Fires automatic, but small trigger and puller. Puller is automatic, but small trigger and puller. Puller is automatic, but small trigger and puller.

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Peas automatic. Two shooter. Puller is automatic, but small trigger and puller. Puller is automatic, but small trigger and puller.

Cap Pistol
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New methods of attack
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Win, 100¢ 31x2 1/2
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Eures. 100¢

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...e delivers a terrific KO
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